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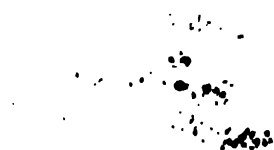


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THE PLEDGE OF THE GRA

CICELY

A TALE OF THE GEORGIA MARCH

BY

SARA BEAUMONT KENNEDY

AUTHOR OF

"JOSCELYN CHESHIRE" "THE WOOING OF JUDITH" AND
"TOLD IN A LITTLE BOY'S POCKET"



FRONTISPIECE BY

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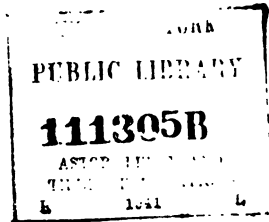
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1911

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**TO MY DEAR NIECE, KATHERINE HELEN HOBSON,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED**

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. Under the Flag	3
II. The Exodus	17
III. The Journey to Pinehurst	29
IV. At Pinehurst	40
V. The Pledge of the Gray Ribbons	50
VI. Redeeming the Pledge	66
VII. The Coming of the Rebels	78
VIII. "Consider Yourself Miss Houston's Prisoner"	89
IX. Mammy's Story	101
X. The Siege Guns from Afar	112
XI. On the Roof at Pinehurst	130
XII. The Search for the Yankee Captain	148
XIII. The Aftermath of the Search	166
XIV. The Window of Escape	184
XV. Cupid Rides with Mars	196
XVI. Two Letters	213
XVII. In the Courier's Saddle	226
XVIII. The Escape in the Dark	242
XIX. Back to Pinehurst	260
XX. Appomattox	280
XXI. The Martial Pageant	300
XXII. The Home-Coming	312
XXIII. A Wedding and a Visitor	324
XXIV. The Belated Wedding Guest	340
XXV. The Triumph of Love	357

CICELY

CHAPTER I

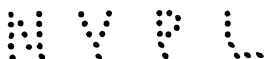
UNDER THE FLAG

A bit of faded silk, a rag,
And yet a thing to die for ! — K.

GUN-GIRT and rampart-shadowed, Atlanta lay under the September sun, fighting her last battles of the long siege. For weeks the Federals' blue line had compassed the northern borders, and now, from either hand, it was sweeping around toward the south to shut the defendants as in a net. If General Hood could not break this cordon, could not stop the unwinding of this blue skein about the city's boundaries, he must retreat or he must surrender. He knew this. and decided on a last sortie.

When the picked band for this was drawn up, awaiting the word of command, he looked them over in person and shook his head at the one beardless face among them — that of a slim young fellow who had enlisted from the academy the year before in response to a call for fresh troops. The colonel in command, seeing him hesitate, said:

"You need have no fear; Raymond Clinch will



carry our flag as far and as fearlessly as any older man you could select." And the lad was left in his place.

At the last moment the enemy's attention was distracted by a few shells thrown from the opposite side of the city. Then the waiting troops heard the order to advance:

"Charge, and *do not look back!*"

They had sworn obedience to the order, and no one pausing, except those who fell in the quickly kindled fire of the enemy, they went into the fight, hurling themselves across the level stretch toward the breastworks from behind which the aroused foe was sending murderous showers of lead to meet them. Like wax in a flame, the gray line melted before that fire, until the order of retreat was given in sheer humanity, and the remnant of the assaulting company fell back. But the young colour-bearer, slightly in advance and obeying literally the orders not to look behind, did not realize the backward movement, and kept steadily on. It was not the firing ahead that finally caught his attention and arrested his steps, but the sudden ceasing of that fire — a strange hush that fell over the battlefield — for the enemy behind the breastworks saw the company's retreat and that solitary advance, and guessed the meaning; and down their line sped the generous command to spare the gallant youth.



An amazed glance forward and rearward as he paused, showed Raymond his perilous position. Fifty paces ahead the grim guns of the foe; as many paces to the rear the receding gray line. A moment under the fluttering colours he hung motionless between the two armies, watched by ten thousand eyes. Then planting his flagstaff firmly where he stood, he turned his head over his shoulder and with his cap waved his comrades back, shouting to them in clarion-clear tones the battle cry of Dixie. And, fired by his call, inspired by his courage, back they went, the rebel yell grating in their dry throats, and fell upon the breastworks in momentary victory. But the intrenchments were too strong, the foe too numerous; and presently they went back cityward in a second and final repulse, the bullet-riddled battle-flag still flying, a blotch of vivid colour amid the rolling smoke. It was Hood's last blow for Atlanta; but Raymond Clinch had won his promotion.

In the early twilight, off duty for a brief time, he went galloping down Whitehall street and swung from his saddle in front of a brick residence on a corner. Quickly he ran between the flower beds and up the stone steps to the entrance, but he did not need to knock, for a girl, who had been leaning from an upper window, flew down stairs and tore open the door.

"Cicely — sweetheart!"

"Oh, Ray, we have heard — it is glorious, glorious — promoted on the field for signal bravery! We are so proud, so very, very proud."

Inside the hall he caught her by the shoulders, his face glowing. "It was for you I did it — do you understand? — for you. A private was not good enough for you, but now you will marry an officer?"

She scarcely noticed the question, but still thrilling with the story of his daring she reached out and touched the bars newly fastened to his collar, saluting him in military fashion:

"Lieutenant Clinch. Ah, how brave and fine it sounds!"

"But you haven't answered me. Be serious a moment, Cicely, and listen. You will marry me? I have only a moment, and I have come all the way from camp to ask you."

"Why, Ray — we have played at sweethearts since we were babies ——"

"Yes, but this is not play, and we are no longer children. You must have known the serious time would come. Look at me, sweet, not down the street. You do promise?"

For a moment a thoughtful gravity clouded the smile in her eyes; then the cloud was gone as she again touched the bars on his collar, recalling the heroism that had won them: "Yes, I promise, Lieutenant Clinch!"

He caught her to him, kissing down her lids until her eyes were close shut: "I shall carry that dear promise higher than a lieutenancy. Do you know, sweetheart, that when I stood under that flag this morning and looked toward the enemy's lines I seemed to see you in the smoke above the ramparts waving your hand to me. I would have dared anything with that image beckoning me on."

"The whole city is talking of you. General Hood himself stopped a moment here at the door to say beautiful things of you to your mother."

"That was good of him. And now I must run in myself to speak to her. Wait here for me."

In five minutes he was back, his eager hand seeking the girl's. Thus they went down the steps and out to the pavement beside his horse.

"I have told mother that you must all get away as quickly as possible, for Atlanta will fall."

Her face went a little white. "General Hood will surrender?"

"No, he will retreat; but you need not look like that; you will be in no danger. This is civilized warfare, and General Sherman will not molest the women he finds here in their homes. I will see you to-morrow and arrange for your departure; in the meantime ——"

But from far down the street a bugle sent its imperative summons. For one brief moment he grasped her hands, telling her how beautiful she

was and how happy his heart was with her promise; then he leaped to horse and went galloping away, a gallant figure in the golden aftermath of the day. The girl did not move until he was out of sight; then again she lifted her hand in that military salute, her eyes shining, her colour deepening:

“Yes, I will marry you, Lieutenant Clinch.”

He did not come again as he had promised, for the next day the gateway of the South was left wide open by the fall of Atlanta. Hood had gone in sorrow and Sherman had come in triumph. Down the streets where so lately trod the men in gray went the marching hordes of blue-clad regulars, the sunlight on buckle and spur and bayonet-tip lighting them as with the gleam of jewels. Drums growled their deep commands, snatches of band music went drifting with the wind, and every captured bulwark bore its brilliant blossom of a Union banner.

From windows, shuttered or thrown wide open as the timidity or courage of the owners dictated, from doorways and porches, the women of the fallen city watched the victorious parade of the captors, stricken in heart but not in hope; for the spirit of Sparta is the spirit of the women of the world when hostile banners fly the wind and their men are on the firing line.

For hours the monotonous tramp of the parade went through the streets, but at last a shriller flare

of trumpets and a deeper growl of drums announced to the watchers along the line of march the coming of the General and his staff; and in curiosity, in wistfulness, in searching appraisal, the hundreds of eyes strained to see the man who, more than any of the whole war, was to influence their fate.

As, with jingle of spurs and bridle-bits and glint of sun on gold lace and burnished accoutrements, the squad of officers passed down the street, a wave of comment followed, rippling from lip to lip, with here and there a sharp inflection, and here and there a quickly indrawn breath.

"Well, what do you think of him — is he ogreish enough to eat us, raw-head and bloody-bones?" laughed one woman to another.

"Is that really Sherman? I believe I actually expected to see him with hoofs and horns."

"Oh, he has them, but not on parade; they'll come in the next act."

"Let us pray not," murmured an old, old woman, leaning on her cane; for she had heard the Indian war whoops at Fort Mimms when Tecumseh led the massacre; she had been in New Orleans at the time of the great fight when Packenham went down before Jackson; and she had nursed the human wrecks that fringed the victorious wave ebbing back from Buena Vista and Chapultepec, and she knew what war meant.

The tramp and jingle of the parade went on.

Suddenly from among the flower borders of the brick house on the corner of Whitehall street a pretty child of five, with curls flying and eyes flashing, rushed out to the edge of the pavement and, leaning over the curb with hands behind her, stuck her little red tongue out derisively at the passing pageant. Then, as suddenly frightened at her own temerity, she beat a quick retreat and took refuge behind her brother, some few years older, who had followed to the gate and stood with shoulders squared as if for battle.

A young captain riding between his men and the curb laughed gayly and, leaning forward, tossed toward the children a small package that had been hidden in the cuff of his gauntlet.

"There is a box of bonbons to cure the wrinkles in your face, my little beauty," he called. But the next moment the boy caught and sent the package whizzing back, striking him on the arm.

"We don't want your Yankee candy," he cried passionately; "you can keep it for ——"

But the tall girl who had run down the steps caught him sharply by the shoulder and turned him about.

"Dick!"

"Well, he — he chunked me first," cried the child, still trembling with his rage.

The young officer had reined in his horse. "You need not make his punishment capital; my wound

is not mortal," he laughed, lifting his cap. But the girl turned her back without answering and all he could see was that her braided hair was dark and the rose over her ear a vivid scarlet.

"A fine sample of impertinence, Fairlee," a fellow officer observed, as they rode on. "The boy strikes you with your own gift and the girl turns her back on you."

"Oh, we have to expect things like that; we did not capture a city of cowards."

Behind them the girl had reached the porch and delivered the children to their grandmother, who lectured them upon their conduct. Then she turned to the tall girl.

"But, Cicely, you should not have gone out; I would have reached them in a moment, and you know I promised your father and Raymond that you should not expose yourself."

"I was in no danger, Cousin Maria, and I was not afraid except for the children. Helen must keep them in the house or we will have it burned over our heads."

"If Helen had only been well enough for us to have gone away before the city fell! Anyhow, I should have insisted on your going."

"You could not foresee that the city would fall; we all hoped so much from General Hood. And as for me, if I did not know that Grandma Houston is worrying, I would much rather be here than with

her on the plantation. All we can do there is to fold our hands and wait. Here we seem a part of the action, and I like the thick of the fight."

"Yes, now that the Federals have actually come, it would be easier for me if you were as timid as Helen," sighed the older woman, glancing into the hall, where the children had run to their invalid mother.

All that day the squads of soldiers came and went, taking absolute and masterful possession of streets and even of houses. Twice during the afternoon the captain who had thrown Marie the bonbons stopped at the curb and made such pretty, petting love to the child, praising her hair, her eyes, her fairy-like grace, that but for Dick's remonstrance she would have been quite melted.

"Did your big sister punish you for throwing the candy back?" he asked of the boy.

"That isn't my sister; that's Cicely."

"Oh," said the officer, as if the explanation was lucid; "but I suppose she lives with you."

"No; she lives with her papa and Grandma Houston down at Pinehurst. She's just come to see us, and now she can't get home."

"Oh," said the officer again. "And does Miss Cicely curl your golden hair, my Lady Marie? It is wonderfully beautiful."

"Of course not," retorted Dick. "Mammy combs Marie's hair."

"Certainly; your mother."

"Mammy isn't mama; she's black. Didn't you have a black mammy?"

He shook his head.

"Well, *whoever did* comb your head when you was little?" asked Marie incredulously.

He shook his head, his face clouding as with a painful memory. "I do not remember; perhaps it did not get combed very often, for I had no mama either."

Children's sympathies lie near the surface, and the two caught the sad inflection in his voice. Marie came across the curb and sat on the stone horse-block.

"If it was long and curly, I 'spec it hurted mighty bad when you *did* comb it," she said reminiscently, glancing at his hair. And the young man's laugh was good to hear.

"Marie," commanded Dick, "come back in the yard. You know what Cicely said."

But the Eve in the child was aroused. She calmly disregarded the order, and, turning her head on one side with a bird-like movement, she asked: "What's the matter with your uniform?"

"Nothing. Why?" the officer asked, glancing at the perfectly fitting coat.

"'Cause Cicely says she 'spises it. She gived her new blue dress to mama's maid 'cause she said she wouldn't be like a Yankee."

"That no doubt pleased the maid."

"My papa's uniform is gray," said Dick, "and so is Uncle Ray's. It was my Uncle Ray who carried that flag out against you all the other day."

The officer was interested: "Indeed! That was a gallant act and you have cause to be proud of him."

Marie nodded solemnly: "Yes; dran'ma cried over him, and Cicely she kissed him for it."

"Miss Cicely is his sister?"

"'Course not. She's — just some sorter kin. Mammy says —"

But Dick interrupted her: "When I'm grown I'm going to have a uniform like my papa's."

"Well, I think blue is prettier than gray. Don't you, Marie?"

Dick prompted her negative reply, but she hesitated and stammered. Then she compromised; Marie could always compromise: "The blue is pretty, but I love my papa's the best."

The officer saluted, laughing: "Spoken like a patriot and a diplomat. Tell your Cousin Cicely what she said, Dick; it will please her rebel heart." And he went galloping away; but he had caught the flash of a red rose as some one turned the shutter of the window above.

The next morning when he passed the house he checked his horse to a walk, but the children were not visible. The tall girl, however, was coming

down the steps, and he saw her face quite plainly. It was oval in shape with the soft skin that shows the blood beneath with the delicate shadings of a sea shell; about the corners of the red mouth dimples might have ambushed had she smiled, and the eyes were large and liquidly dark. The officer watched closely for some sign of memory on her part of yesterday's incident that might give him a pretext to lift his cap. But although she was looking toward him she gave the impression of absolutely overlooking him as she directed the negro gardener among the flower beds.

He rode on with the poise of a trained cavalryman, a smile lighting the depths of his gray eyes.

"Some young empress must have arrived from a neighbouring planet and be sojourning among us under an assumed name," he said with a shrug.

In the next street he noticed a toy shop, and seeing some dolls in the window he dismounted and went in. "Find me one dressed in some colour besides blue," he said. But the shopkeeper searched in vain for another shade, so he bought one and riding back to the brick house on the corner he gave it to the negro gardener, who was now alone in the yard, to be delivered to Marie.

Passing that way again in the afternoon a wailing as of a funeral hymn attracted him, and leaving his horse he crossed the pavement to learn the cause. It was an execution. From a limb of the lilac bush

the blue-clad doll hung by its neck, while half a dozen children, gathered in a semicircle, chanted the funeral dirge. In the centre, with mammy's black shawl pinned about her, stood Marie, enacting the rôle of only mourner at the hanging. The significance of the scene flashed over the officer, and he glanced quickly across the street to where a sentinel stood on duty.

"What does all this mean?" he asked sharply of the children.

Then Marie's woe became more vociferous and very genuine: "They'se hanging my dolly you sent me, 'cause Dick and Tom say it's a Yankee doll, a spy-doll, and people hang spy men," she wailed.

The officer leaned over the fence and with his knife cut the string that bound the waxen neck. "Here," he said, tossing the puppet to Marie, "take it in the house and get your Cousin Cicely to dress it in another colour. And Dick, you and your friends had better find something better to do than hanging Yankee dolls in your front yard while General Sherman holds the city."

Then he returned to his horse, leaving a silent group under the lilac bush. But at the upper window the shutter creaked.

Or did somebody laugh behind it?

CHAPTER II

THE EXODUS

But pray ye that your flight be
not in the winter—St. Matthew.

UNLIKE Mrs. Clinch, Cicely did not resent the triumphant manner of the Federal soldiers; she felt that in their place she, too, would have been exultant. But her heart was full of foreboding for the South, for already the Confederacy was levying on its beardless boys to recruit its thinning ranks. Ray and her brother Guy had left their studies in response to that last call for troops sent out from Richmond — the levy that was to run its pitiful gamut from smooth-faced youth to hobbling age. She herself had urged the boys to go, although she knew that the insatiate war-god, to upbuild a new government or to glorify a failure, must take his tithe from the ranks of her own dear ones as from those of other women. Even now, when she saw the unwisdom of the war, she kept saying to herself, as she watched the military pageant of the city's occupation, that there was nothing to do but to fight.

But here in the captured city were no fighters, only women and children and old men. From the Federal officers the treatment they received was as fair as a captive people could expect; but behind the officers was a class of privates who preyed upon the unfortunate people privily but ruthlessly, goading them at times almost beyond the point of endurance. But they set their teeth and bore it; for under the suspense and anxiety, under the outward patience and the inward heartache, there burned the indomitable spirit of Dixie, which nor heights nor depths nor principalities nor tyrannies can separate from the soil of the South.

The second morning after the doll episode, before sunrise, Cicely was wakened by Marie's old nurse, who whispered that one of the family servants — a man who had gone away to the army — had returned and wished to speak to her. He had slipped through the lines the night before and was now with the gardener in the rose arbour. They had been afraid to let him come into the house because of the picket in the side street; his beat lay to and fro just outside of the low fence, and he kept such strict watch on the back premises. The prospect of hearing from her father set Cicely's pulses in a quick quiver, and she was soon dressed. At the entrance to the arbour the gardener stopped her, twisting at the vines long enough to jerk his other thumb warningly over his shoulder:

"Be keerful, Missy, an' doan talk loud; dem Yankees is al'ays listenin' an' watchin'."

In the arbour the messenger took a letter from the lining of his battered hat: "Yo' pa say y'all is ter git permits and leave de city an' got er ole Miss quick ez you ken, Missy. An' he say as how Mars Ray is wid Gen'ul Wheeler's critter cump'ny, and doin' fine. Mars Ray hissef sont me dis here letter feryo'."

The girl, smiling at the description of Wheeler's cavalry, praised the man for his skill in avoiding detection. As she took the letter there was the sound of voices and of horses' hoofs in the street; the guard was being changed. Old Jim hobbled close.

"Missy, dey done seed you; mek lak you's showin' 'bout de ras'ber'y vines."

With the first line of Ray's note swimming before her eyes, Cicely wheeled sharply and began to point from place to place, as if giving the man orders. Instantly his rake was busy among the dead leaves and trash at the roots of the vines. With a final gesture, Cicely turned, meaning to retrace her steps to the house, but stopped, for the captain of the guard, Marie's friend, had leaped the fence and was approaching her. When he was quite near he lifted his cap.

"You are an early gardener," he smiled.

"Yes, it is early," she said, with even dignity. Then when he did not move, she asked quietly. "What can I do for you?"

In a moment he was the soldier on duty. "My men report that a suspicious looking negro entered your garden half an hour ago and is now in the harbour behind you."

To protect the negro by any sort of subterfuge she knew instantly would be impossible, so her answer was quick and candid: "No suspicion attaches to him; he is — or rather he was — my cousin's coachman. He has tired of the war — of which he tried both sides, yours and mine — and has come home to stay."

The Federals had long been familiar with this change of heart on the part of the ex-slaves, so the captain was quite satisfied with her explanation thus far; but he pointed to the note which she held in one hand, while the other gathered her skirts daintily out of the dew.

"And is that some of the spoils of war that he has brought with him?"

Her face flushed. "This, sir, is a letter to me."

"Yes, but the contents ——"

"Are of a private nature, bearing on no public question."

"But this man brought it into the city?"

"He did."

"And he came surreptitiously from the Confederate lines?"

"He did."

"It is a most disagreeable duty," he said slowly,

“but in such perilous times as these every avenue of information has to be watched. General Sherman has learned that valuable information of his movements and positions is being sent out of the city, and we have strict orders to seize all correspondence that comes under our notice.”

“You mean that you wish my letter, although I tell you it is of a private character?” demanded the girl.

“I have no other choice. This negro slips into the city and to your garden with a letter from beyond the lines — I am not permitted any discretion in the matter; my duty is clear.”

She did him the justice to see his position in this light, but that did not lessen the resentment that flashed through her that any one should read Ray’s letter — his first love letter to her.

“But even if this letter did contain seditious information, I am in no position to injure your general,” she parried.

“Perhaps not; but that does not alter my orders.”

The gardener had set a match to the heap of leaves and trash in the walk, and its blaze leaped up rudely beside her. He noticed how the glow changed the hue of her dark hair.

“I shall have to trouble you for that letter,” he said, stretching out his hand.

“And if I refuse to surrender it?”

“You will not refuse, for you will not wish me to

take it forcibly, and I have told you my orders." He was again reaching for it with quiet authority.

Her first love letter — a thing a woman treasures through life! Yet there seemed no alternative but obedience.

"Since there is no *other* way——" She raised her arm, the paper fluttered in her fingers, then — fell suddenly into the blazing fire, and she laughed at him out of the film of blue smoke. He sprang forward and stooped to snatch the letter from the fire, but she caught his sleeve and held it. And then in a quick moment the paper untwisted in the white heat, and together they read the line disclosed:

"Sweetheart, you know that I love you, love you——" The flame crackled over the sheet, and it was all gray ashes.

Slowly the two straightened up and looked at each other. She drew away haughtily; but he was laughing.

"A love letter is hardly seditious," he began; but she was already half-way to the garden gate, her heels clicking sharply on the gravel, the young sunshine of the September day baptizing her slender figure. When she passed out of sight the captain turned to the harbour, but it was empty.

Cicely went at once to Mrs. Clinch with her father's message, but that lady shook her head: "It is too late; Helen could not stand such a journey; already this excitement has told badly upon her.

Besides, in whose care could I leave my house and furniture?"

"If Dick hangs many more Yankee dolls in the front yard you will not have a house to leave," laughed Cicely, and went up stairs, thinking of Ray's letter, trying to fancy its contents. On her mantel was a daguerrotype of him at the age of ten — as slender and dark-eyed as she herself. But as she paused before it she saw, beyond the childish features, the face of the youthful officer who had leaned out of his saddle to take his last leave of her a week ago.

"Lieutenant Clinch, of Wheeler's 'critter cump'ny,'" she whispered; and her eyes were shining and tender, but the salute of her lifted hand was the salute of Mars.

An hour later the revery into which she had fallen in the window seat behind the seemingly closed shutters was rudely broken by the appearance, below, of two officers, the young captain and his colonel; and in a few minutes Dick announced that his grandmother wanted her down stairs. Her eyes kindled as she went; of course it was about that letter and she knew what she would say to the outwitted captain. In the sitting room she found several neighbours grouped near the window; Helen lay on her couch with the startled children beside her; Cousin Maria faced the colonel, who stood on the hearth rug, while the captain was at the far end of

the mantel, partially behind his superior. Cicely purposely avoided looking at him as she entered.

"Cicely," said Cousin Maria, and her voice was high and thin with excitement, "I have sent for you to hear General Sherman's latest order. He has commanded all the women and children and non-combatants to leave the city in a few days."

The girl caught her breath; it was, then, not the letter, after all. "To leave the city? I do not understand. Where does he expect them to go?"

"To starve in the woods perhaps, as he knows that all the country south and west of here is already full of refugees who fled before his advance from Chattanooga. But will you read the order again?" and Mrs. Clinch nodded toward the older officer.

And then was read that military order which is a part of history, expelling from the city all the old men and women and children who made up its civil population. The sentences fell like so many bombs upon the listening ears, and in the room was a silence like death, and the golden motes dancing in the sunlight seemed the only motion as the officer folded the paper and returned it to his pocket.

"General Sherman," he continued, "intends to convert the city into a citadel for his troops; therefore he will depopulate it of all non-combatants of both sexes, sending them North or South as they shall choose. He has already communicated his intention to General Hood, and a truce of several

days has been agreed on, during which the families in the city who wish to go South will be moved by our men to the station of Rough-And-Ready. At that place there will be a neutral camp with a guard of one hundred Federals and one hundred Confederates to see that the families are sent on by wagon to the cars at Lovejoy's Station; and General Hood will be responsible for their transportation beyond that to whatever points they themselves choose."

"But if they have no choice — nowhere to go; will he leave them homeless, helpless?" Cicely's voice vibrated with emotion. The captain, who had not lifted his eyes during the reading, suddenly looked up.

"We are not responsible for their helplessness," said the colonel.

"Certainly you are, since you create it by driving them from their rightful shelter."

"General Sherman's one consideration is for military advancement, and he cares very little for outside condemnation so long as he has the approval of the authorities at Washington," the Colonel answered. "I presume that I am to inform General Sherman that you acquiesce in his plan and will be ready to move out of the city at the appointed time?"

There was a moment's tense silence while the women looked at each other; then the girl spoke slowly:

"Go back to your commander and tell him this from the women of Atlanta: that we have no condemnation for General Grant for his capture and occupation of Vicksburg, for it was done fairly under the rules of war; that although we resent General Butler's insulting order to our sex in New Orleans, yet we realize that even he left the women in their homes; but that, if General Sherman persists in making exiles of these homeless, defenceless people, he will earn for himself the abiding bitterness of the South. No number of years will ever win him forgiveness."

Before she had finished, the colonel had walked from the room, but the captain waited, and bowed gravely to each group before following.

From house to house the tidings of the exile order sped, and the city was storm-swept with consternation. Everywhere women with hysterical tears or stern, white faces vociferously asked or dumbly wondered what was to become of them, for outside of their homes they had no asylum, no claim of shelter; and expulsion meant suffering and property loss too bitter to contemplate. But Sherman remained obdurate even in the face of Hood's written protest.

"Because," he said, "the order is not designed to meet the humanities of the case, but to prepare for future martial emergencies. You must go, all of you; and take the old and sick with you, and feed

and nurse and care for them until those who brought this war about shall put an end to it by submission to the national government.”*

Then, indeed, the women of Atlanta faced the inevitable. With set faces but heroic resolution they began their preparations, selecting what they might carry, packing the few valuables left to them after the looting visits of that class of soldiers — the very scum of the army of the republic — who were to become known the world over as “Sherman’s bummers.”

In every household there were confusion and hurry. Women went from room to room, picking up one article only to drop it for something that seemed more necessary or more dear through association. And children fretted and clung about their mothers’ skirts, not understanding.

The truce for the moving was for ten days.

Slowly the great exodus began. The scene in the fallen city has not its parallel for heartache and tragic pain except that woful day when the simple-hearted Acadians were herded like sheep upon the waiting ships and sent forth forever from their native homes. The streets were filled with pale women leading curious-eyed children; with here or there a cart or wagon piled with the scanty household treasures the mandate of expulsion permitted them to take. There were secret tears, but no public

*Sherman’s Memoirs



weeping. Proudly they went, old and young; some, like Lot's wife, looking back to the homes they had known always, dim-eyed, filled with longing and foreboding; others with the Spartan spirit of renunciation, gazing always ahead, never turning to catch even so much as a fleeting farewell glimpse of hospitable doors through which had flowed the currents of their happy lives. Suddenly, in the passing of a night, in the shifting of a shadow, those homes became as tombs to which memory was to be the only pilgrim of the future.

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNEY TO PINEHURST

The foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, but many of these had not where to lay their heads — Paraphrase

IN THE last train-load of exiles that drew out of Atlanta on the last day of the exodus-truce were Cicely and the party she had selected to go with her to her father's plantation; for in that woful time no hand was backward in its hospitality; those who had homes shared them to the last bed and crust with the less fortunate refugees. In Cicely's party were twelve.

"For of course father would expect Aunt McIntosh and the girls, and poor old Cousin Polly and Miss Brewster have nowhere else to go. Grandma Houston would be angry if we left Miss Brewster, for she has done the family bonnets for three generations, and she is so friendless."

"But you must remember that Minna has already gone to Pinehurst from Savannah, and I expect your grandmother sent for Cousin Simon too; he and she were children together, and she never neglects him."

"That does not matter, Cousin Maria; the house

is big, and mammy and Uncle Jake and I can manage the pantry. If we are too crowded, Aunt Hinton and Lena will help us. I only wish I could take all these poor people who have no homes."

At Rough-And-Ready, where they left the train, women, children, and old men stood in disconsolate groups waiting, with the patience that is born of hopelessness, to be transferred to Lovejoy's Station, whence such trains as General Hood could supply would scatter them southward. And while they waited they watched the military guards sort the mass of household goods that cumbered the space about the depot, loading what was possible upon the army wagons for transportation to the railway station, casting much aside as useless; for already the accumulation was beginning to melt away, and many an old rosewood treasure or mahogany heirloom was reduced to kindling wood by the rough handling. The utter forlornness of it all went to Cicely's heart with a cruel stab, as she waited during the long hours for a wagon to carry her party onward. In the neutral camp, established by the joint Union and Confederate guards that made the transfers, Helen and the older women found such comfort as could be provided; for though the mandate of expulsion was carried out with soldierly obedience, there was many a wearer of the blue whose sympathy was quickened for the helpless, expatriated people. The work was done quietly and consider-

ately, and the long line of transfer wagons, with its attendant guards in gray and blue, had in it something of the elements of a funeral cortège. When the party for Pinehurst at last started, it was Colonel Warner himself, the Federal in command, who lifted Helen bodily over the high wheel and courteously wished it were an easier vehicle.

It was rough riding, indeed, they found as they jolted onward under the hot September sun. Cicely, looking straight ahead, was thinking of the safe shelter awaiting them at Pinehurst, when Marie, who was wedged in between her and Dick, suddenly wriggled forward, her bright head cocked to one side, and before Dick could clap his hand over her rebellious little mouth, shouted to the inspecting officer who had ridden up to speak to the driver:

"I couldn't bring the spy-doll; there wasn't any room!"

It was her captain, and he lifted his cap, smiling, but aware that the "young empress" was again ignoring him: "That is a pity. Where is she?"

"I lef' her on the parlor sofa; and dran'ma says I'll find her there if you all don't burn our house down. Is you going to burn it?"

"If it is burned, it will not be by any fire of my kindling." Again he lifted his cap, smiled, and turned his horse.

"Marie, I believe you *just love* to talk to Yankees," scolded Dick.

But Cicely said gently: "She is only a baby, Dick; she does not understand."

As they approached Lovejoy's Station they passed a queer colony of tents patched together of awnings and rugs and bed covers. In the doors sat women who had been accustomed to the comfort of luxurious homes.

"Who are these?" Cicely asked.

"Campers who can't get any farther," replied the driver, a soldier of the gray detailed for this duty. "They've lost everything and haven't any right anywhere. There are more of them in the woods over yonder. They'll freeze and starve before the winter is over."

"And the city yonder full of empty houses!" cried Cicely, hiding her face in her hands to shut out the sorrowful pictures. But presently Marie plucked her by the sleeve.

"Look, Cousin Cicely, what a funny little woman!"

Under a tree by the roadside stood an old, old woman, leaning on a cane and gazing stonily at the wagon train. Beside her a boy, no older than Dick, kept pulling at her dress.

"I know who she is," said the driver. "She has nowhere on earth to go. They just wander back like this toward the city from the Station yonder, when there isn't anything ahead. The next wagon will probably bring her back again. I carried her over yesterday."

"Stop a moment," the girl said. And when he was opposite the old woman he obeyed. "Where are you going, old lady?"

Somewhere some one was speaking to her, the old woman knew, but it was some moments before the stony gaze relaxed and the eyes fastened on the face of the girl leaning out of the wagon.

"Where am I going? Going to my grave; Sherman can't turn me out of that!" she cried shrilly.

"Haven't you any friends or relatives to stay with until after the war?" asked Cicely gently.

"Relatives! Just one great-grandchild, and he is here." She paused, then suddenly lifted her cane dramatically: "War, did you say? War takes everybody. My grandfather fell at King's Mountain, and my father at New Orleans. I buried my husband after the savage charge at Fort Mimms. One of my sons was slain at the pass of Cerro Gordo, and they brought one home from Buena Vista to die in my arms. War! I tell you every war has taken its dole of my blood — and now this one will take me, and only little Jimmy will be left for the next. Relatives to care for me? How could there be relatives when war claims everybody? But I have soldier's blood in me, girl, I have soldier's blood, and I know how to die; Sherman shall know that!" Her voice shrilled clear to the last sentence, and she tried to draw her bent form up straight, but drooped suddenly to the boy's shoulder.



The inspecting officer, who had kept to the rear since his talk with Marie, riding up to learn the cause of the stop, saw Cicely leap lightly over the wagon wheel and catch the old woman's hand.

"I know how to die!" the old voice quavered again.

"Yes; but you shall go home with me and die in peace. My father is a soldier, and he would never forgive me if I left the widow of another soldier to perish in the wilderness. Come! Oh, there is room and welcome for you. Help me put her in the wagon, Jimmy."

But Captain Fairlee was now beside her: "The wagon is full."

"She shall have my seat; I will walk with Jimmy." And before the amazed old woman realized what was happening she was lifted to the vacant place, and the driver had started his team at a brisk pace to regain the lost time. The inspecting officer dropped from his saddle.

"Your generosity has cost you your seat. It is fully a mile to the Station; will you not ride my horse?"

For the second time since that day Marie had made her wry face at him, the tall girl seemed to him aware of his presence; neither of them liked to think of that other time beside the burning leaves in the garden.

"You are very kind; but I prefer to walk." Her

tone was perfectly polite, but also perfectly cold.

"The mare is quite gentle, I assure you."

"I am accustomed to horses, and am never afraid; it is a matter of preference." She bowed in acknowledgment of his offer and, taking the boy's hand, followed the receding wagon. As they walked she won and charmed the child with descriptions of the things he should do on the big plantation; the man walking behind caught her coaxing voice and the boy's delighted replies. Yes, he should climb for apples in the orchard, and he should ride Dick's pony sometimes, and sometimes he should go on the mule behind old Jake when he went for the cows; and there would be wild grapes in the wood by the creek where the cows drank.

The boy stumbled on, his face turned up rapturously to hers as she reiterated his coming pleasures — the picture before him was so enchanting compared to the destitution and utter nothingness that had loomed up before him and his "granny" a few minutes ago. Was she sure Dick would let him ride? Oh, yes, quite sure. And the apples were red? Beautifully red; and there would be guinea nests to hunt in the fence corners. His eyes grew big with excitement; then another thought came, an unpleasant thought:

"Will there be any Yankees there?"

"No; the plantation is too far in the country for

them to find us. You and I will see our last Yankees to-day."

The man behind had come a little closer to hear her answer, and the child suddenly tightened his grip on her hand, whispering that the soldier was following them. She had forgotten him, and for a moment she felt the blood tingle in her veins. Was he trying to force his presence upon her — this captain from the foeman's ranks? Her chin went up with a little hostile tilt characteristic of her when angry. She turned so sharply that the officer was almost upon them before he could stop.

"Why do you not mount your horse?" It was surely the voice of that young empress from some other planet!

Instantly he was bareheaded before her: "Because I am going to see you safely to the Station, and I could not possibly ride and have a lady walk in the dust beside me."

The courtesy of the answer disarmed her, and the hostility left her voice and eyes. She bent her head gravely: "You are giving yourself much unnecessary trouble. The wagons are so close together and the guards so numerous that no possible annoyance can come to me."

"Nevertheless, as you are afoot I feel responsible for you. I am appointed to watch over just such travellers."

"As you please."

She turned and resumed her walk, answering the city child's eager questions about the strange country life he was going to lead; but through the talk there came the plod, plod of the shod hoofs behind, with now and then the grating sound of the human step. She knew that her voice reached back to that other auditor, and it so irritated her that at times her words tripped each other, or else she faltered, forgetting what she had intended to say; and so presently she fell silent, leaving the boy to picture for himself his new pleasures. At the Station she quickly threaded her way through the knots of people who came and went, trying to identify their baggage and property among the piles the teamsters unloaded. But she knew that the officer kept close behind her. On the railway platform steps she paused and turned her head with a formal courtesy:

"Your self-imposed task is at an end. Yonder are my friends."

He bowed with equal formality: "I wish I might have been of some special service to you."

"That would have presupposed a breach of discipline on the part of your guards."

"No; you might have fallen and broken ——"

"My neck? Ah! that would indeed have called for a special service — the ordering of a rebel funeral."

He laughed out loud, and there was a glint of

mischievous in her own eyes: "You might have made it a little less gruesome!" Then, as she was once more mounting the steps, he called after her, "Kindly say to Marie that I will look after the 'spy-doll' if possible."

"She will thank you for the special service." There was just a shade of emphasis on the last words that set him again to smiling, but she moved on down the platform to where Cousin Maria was signalling her, and he mounted the horse he had been leading. Several times, as he picked his way through the crowded people and vehicles, he turned to watch her, but she did not look back once.

That night as the crowded train lumbered and jostled on its way Helen's gentle spirit passed out into the unknown world. The excitement and the hard, comfortless journey had been too much for her feeble strength, and she succumbed to the strain. But Cicely's party still had its full number, for a little motherless babe was crying in Cousin Maria's arms.

With the slow travel and the many stops and delays, it was the afternoon of the next day before Cicely and her friends reached the wayside station from whose platform the smoke from the Pinehurst chimneys could be seen when the trees were bare. Grandma Houston had not, of course, known of their coming, and so there was another delay before a note which Dick and Jimmy carried brought Jake

with the carriage, Big Ben with the farm wagon and the gardener with the wagonette. Then once more the little company took up its journey, moving in procession up the avenue of whispering pines to the brick house with its high-fluted columns, its wide porches, and its multitudinous gables and windows, standing among bright flower beds and vegetable gardens. The centre of the building was slightly advanced, the gabled sides spreading out and backward like hovering wings, the right one mantled with thick ivy. To the heart-weary, homesick refugees it seemed like a haven of peace and rest.

On the porch, with the guests who had already sought refuge under its hospitable roof, stood Grandma Houston, leaning on her gold-headed cane, her cap strings blowing in the wind, her old eyes searching the group for the first sight of Cicely's face.

CHAPTER IV

AT PINEHURST

Three Graces they are, and three fates wait on them — Anon.

IN THE golden autumn weeks that followed the return to Pinehurst, Cicely set herself earnestly to care for the large family she had gathered under her roof. She had sent her father a letter by the guard from Rough-And-Ready, and after much delay she had his answer — written from Savannah, whither General Hardee had retired. She had acted wisely in every way; the plantation was remote from the scene of strife and its produce would feed the little colony for many months.

“So you see, mammy, it is all right,” Cicely said, reading the letter to the old woman who had nursed her from motherless babyhood.

“Maybe ’tis, missy; but it sho gwine tek er sight uf victuals ter feed sech er crowd.”

“Why, we have always been used to company in the house.”

“ ’Coase we is; but we ain never had er *'sylum* befo,” grumbled the old woman.

The girl patted her bandanna turban affectionately. "Is there any one here you would have had me leave to suffer among strangers or starve in the woods around Atlanta?"

"No, honey, for blood's blood; an' dey's all yo' kin, 'cepen Miss Brewster an' Jimmy an' his granny — an' I 'spec dem three doan count much," she answered, laying out the clean napkins for dinner.

"Put out two more, mammy; Aunt Hinton and Lena are here for the day."

"Dat meks eighteen," grumbled the old woman, as the girl left the room. "Doan know how we gwine keep up dis lick all winter, wid so many uf de niggers runnin' erway ter de Yankees. But den I 'spec missy knows her biznes."

"Ef she doan, it'd be de fust time she ever missed it," said Jake, polishing the forks.

News from the outside strife came but rarely, but the household of women employed itself as far as possible in working for the soldiers in the field — knitting socks and gloves, preparing lint and bandages to be sent on to the hospitals by the chance couriers who passed that way.

In her efforts at hospitality Cicely shared the labour of each group, and her constant companion was Minna McIntosh. Minna was small and dainty and hazel-eyed, and with an assumption of worldly wisdom that was at absurd variance

with her gay coqueties and her frank, contagious laughter. She formed a very sharp contrast to Lena Hinton, another cousin, whose home was not many miles from Pinehurst and who came often for the day with her relatives. For Lena, though younger than either of the other two girls, was graver of nature, and had the pale, clear features, the flaxen hair and shy blue eyes of an artist's saint. The three had spent much of their childhood together, and were devotedly attached.

One morning, sitting on the porch knitting soldier socks, they fell to talking of that sad exodus from Atlanta and of Cicely's journey home.

"What a romantic experience that walk from Rough-And-Ready was," sighed Minna, dropping her work on her lap and swinging to and fro in her rocker. "I envy you that much of your journey."

"A broiling sun and dust six inches deep are not conducive to romance."

"Oh, they were only immaterial adjuncts. The thrilling part was that handsome Yankee captain following afoot as your special bodyguard."

Cicely's eyebrows went up: "Even that was not exactly epoch making!"

"Don't you think so? Well, I wish I had been in your place — your reserve keeps you from seeing the possibilities of such situations."

"If it had been you instead of Cicely, you would have forgotten your dignity and flirted with him," said Lena, reproof in her voice.

"Now, Lena, don't be censorious. You cannot knit and lecture on morals at the same time — you'd drop something, if it was only your stitches."

"Come, come, Minna," put in Cicely, "there's no use denying a self-evident fact. You know you'd flirt with that lily stalk out yonder if it could 'make eyes' back at you."

"You always side with Lena against me," pouted Minna. But the obscuration of her good humour was rarely more than momentary, her swift changes being one of her fascinations. She leaned back now, pelting her cousins with bits of honeysuckle from the vine at hand. "You, Miss Prude, and you, my fine Lady Cicely Indifference, you miss half the fun of life by not 'making eyes.' That is one of the special purposes for which Providence put them in our heads."

"I am inclined to think that you are translating Providence to suit your own ideas."

"Well, isn't that what all the preachers do? That is what creates denominations and sects. Anyhow, when I make eyes I am exercising one of my most valuable feminine privileges."

"Is it such a privilege to make one man hate another?" asked Lena.

Minna smoothed her ruffles after the manner of

a bird preening its feathers: "And, pray, who is it I have been teaching to hate his fellow-man?"

"Joe Howell. You have encouraged him to such a degree that he is positively miserable if you so much as look at any one else."

"Is that so?" was the satisfied answer. "Well, Lena, my dear, I am two years older than you, and I have learned this as a world-truth: That a man is never so genuinely happy as when he is perfectly miserable about some charming woman."

Cicely laughed with delight: "Is that an epigram or an Irish bull?"

"It is, as I said, a great and undeniable truth."

"What do you suppose Grandma Houston would say if she heard you?"

"She'd say," and Minna's voice changed instantly from youth to the quaver of age and the acidity of reproof, "'Minna, my dear, too much worldly knowledge is apt to sour on a young girl's stomach, and a sour stomach is bad for the complexion and the disposition.' When grandma talks like that I always get the hand mirror and look for liver spots or freckles."

Again Cicely laughed, then added with a touch of gravity that war topics always brought: "But your boasted feminine privilege of 'making eyes' is apt to rust from lack of use, for as long as this war lasts we will see no men folk."

Minna made a face as at a bitter dose: "Why

remind me of the disagreeable fact? I've been wishing I were a dormouse to sleep away the trying time. Positively, we girls will take to pecking at each other for something better to do. A man in a household is like a precipitate in chemistry — he adjusts things."

"Or else he is the disrupting influence. It is a matter of history that a man got a certain lovely woman turned out of her garden by telling tales on her."

"Well, for my part, I never blamed Adam for telling, for Eve, like a greedy, left him nothing but the apple core, and cores are not exactly epicurean dainties."

"I always imagined that Adam ate the core to conceal it — to hide the traces of their guilt."

"Then he ought to have swallowed hard and gotten rid of it altogether. That is just like the half-hearted way some men have of helping a woman out. But seriously, Cicely, how do you expect to keep the peace in this house full of women?"

Cicely shrugged her shoulders: "Paradise was peaceful until the coming of that same Eve. Peace will reign here on a balancing principle — an Eveless Eden, an Adamless Pinehurst. You understand?"

Minna shuddered: "Adamless! What an abominable word; it ought to be cut out of the dictionary. I suppose my lovely pink dress, the only new one I

have had in ages, will become food for moths, for there is no use wearing it unless there are masculine eyes to look the right kind of admiration."

"The right kind?" asked Lena.

"Yes, Lena — simplicity. Men look at a pretty girl in a becoming dress with a glance that seems to say they could eat her up and enjoy every mouthful; but other women look at her as if they would like to chew her up and spit her out."

"That is another opinion Grandma Houston ought to hear, both for its sentiment and phrasology," said Cicely.

"Poor, dear old lady; I wonder what she would do without me to stir her up occasionally? Reach me my guitar, Cicely; I want to sing — "

"'My Lover Has Bonny Brown Eyes' — like Joe's?"

"No; the Doxology. Love songs are out of place in this strictly feminine household." And she sang the stanza to the close; then, still strumming on the instrument, she asked irrelevantly, "Cicely, if you had fainted that day on the road to Lovejoy's, do you suppose the fascinating Yankee would have lifted you in his 'strong arms and borne you tenderly but respectfully to your destination,' as they say in the story books?"

"The matter is not supposable, as I never fainted in my life."

"Oh, but you might have, you know; it was warm

and dusty, and you might have fainted if you had been really — really enterprising.”

“Enterprising! Minna, you ought to have paid more attention to the definition of words when you were at school.”

“Oh, words don’t matter when the meaning is apparent.”

“Well, I suppose if I had been silly enough to faint, the captain would have put me a-dangle across his horse, head one side, feet the other, and delivered me at the station platform, like a sack of oats.”

“I don’t believe a word of it. But,” and she shot a sly glance at Cicely, “let us change the men and suppose it had been Ray with you—how then?”

“Quit supposing absurdities and sing again. It is the only time you are really sensible, when you are repeating the words of other people.”

Minna laughed and picked up the guitar again, and while the necessary tuning and strumming were going on, Lena leaned toward Cicely:

“Tell us again of Ray’s promotion.”

She had rehearsed it a hundred times, but her dark eyes still kindled with that charge — the brave figure alone under the fluttering flag, the quick generosity of the foe, the gallant rally and the final retreat. She had a torn piece of that battle flag up stairs in her jewel box; Ray had given it to

her. After the war she meant to have it framed in gold like a miniature.

She told it all glowingly, breathlessly, for to her no repetition could ever stale the story; but when at the end she laid her hand over Lena's she found it trembling violently. In a swift contrition and with a motherly gesture she gathered the pale girl in her arms. For in a similar charge Doctor Hinton had fallen, one of the first victims of the war. Inadvertently she had revived for his daughter the whole sad scene.

"Lena, dear, I am so sorry to have hurt you; I should have remembered."

But Lena drew herself away gently, and presently lifted a tear-stained but glowing face to the other's gaze:

"Father said a patriot held back nothing from his country. It is a glorious thing when the men of one's family are like that."

"Yes, we can be proud of our people. Deeds like those of your father and Ray will be told over and over, and shine like light-points down all the years."

And then somehow, for Minna's song had been forgotten and her guitar had slipped to the floor, a queer silence fell on the three as they looked out over the brilliant mosaic of the flower beds and dreamed, each in her way, of that untried future. And one face was happy with hope, one was shadowed with doubt, and one was pinched with pain.

For the eyes of one saw the coming years unruffled of storm; one knew not how for her the tides would turn, and one faced the sureness of shipwreck. Above the three heads the Fates were spinning, spinning; but where the threads would lighten or darken in the webs only the moving finger of time could show.

And so it was that, with loving work for absent ones and an ever throbbing thought of the strife beyond their gates, the "Adamless" colony lived through those days — days that went by like beads upon a string, some golden with sun tints, some amethyst with the trailing autumn mists. And as each sun went down into the shadows, Cicely stood with lifted hand before that miniature on her mantel and said:

"I salute my superior officer, Lieutenant Clinch."

CHAPTER V

THE PLEDGE OF THE GRAY RIBBONS

The sign of faith, the broken stone 'twixt friends—Gulick

SHERMAN had dreamed his dream of a march to the sea, and awakened to its fulfilment in the first days of November. Outside of the deserted city's limits the army was assembled for the morrow's start. It was past midnight, but no darkness curtained Atlanta, for red flames, licking from one building to another, burned a great hole in the night, and put out the stars with their ruder glare and with the clouds of smoke that billowed upward. Public buildings and private homes fed the keen appetite of the fire kindled for the city's destruction, while post and company bands from the camp without vied with each other in playing triumphant airs and operatic selections, the music mingling grotesquely with the roar of the flames.

At the door of a tent Marie's captain stood with another officer, watching the scene of annihilation.

"You do not look as if you liked it, Fairlee."

The other shook his head: "A captain may not criticise his commander's orders; but have you been out to the woods around Lovejoy recently and seen the pitiful plight of the people who own some of the houses burning yonder?"

"No."

"You would understand better my feelings about this useless destruction. I have been on duty in that quarter."

The other man laughed: "At your old tricks of sentimentalizing! I always told you at the Point that you were not a good enough hater to be a soldier."

"I do not think it is necessary to hate the foe you fight; you have only to believe in the justice of your own cause."

"With you it may be so, but I find that unless I hate a little I can not hit hard. You ought to have stayed out of this war."

"No," replied Fairlee, with quick emphasis, "I could not stay out because I want the South in the Union — because I honestly believe that, as broad as this land is, it is too narrow to hold two separate governments. A united and developed country, we will become a world-power, holding our own with the best of Europe; while two small republics would be too busy snarling at each other's throats to command outside respect and influence. The one

way to keep the nation united was to resist Southern secession; that was why I did not resign my commission as many others did."

His friend looked at him admiringly: "You always did sweep me off my feet with your grand ideas. I seem to see the great nation you would upbuild. It is a pity the whole army does not share your purely Union sentiments."

Fairlee smiled grimly: "Yes; but it would be a useless pretence for us to disguise the fact that hundreds of the men gathered under our tents have no spark of patriotism in them; they are hirelings simply fighting for the money they receive and the loot they pick up. Such men are necessary to the winning of battles perhaps, but — they are a curse to the people whose country they invade."

"Well, you and I, at least, will keep our men under control during this march, that the people may not curse us unnecessarily."

"I hope so. The expulsion of the inhabitants of this city is surely suffering enough for one section."

"I dare say we shall find many of those same exiled women refugeeing along our route."

"I would not be surprised," replied the captain, with a sudden memory of a tall girl with dark eyes and scornful red lips. But the memory lost its vivid interest the next moment as he recalled her words to the child: "The plantation lies too far in the country for the Yankees to find us." He

pushed his cap back impatiently. Was he glad to know she was so safely hidden? Then they turned back to the tent for their arms, for the dawn had come while they talked; the camp was aroused, the long blue, undulating line was beginning to uncoil toward the southeast, and Sherman was on his march to the sea.

And behind, he left Atlanta a charred, blackened, desolate ruin. Where peace had ruled and love had dwelt the vagrant winds now held their carnival. Among the heaps of rubbish that had once been prosperous homes, cats prowled or dogs, half crazed with hunger, snapped and snarled; while high above, in the blue of the autumn sky, vultures soared on slow-flapping wing, ever ready to swoop downward to their prey.

The army, sixty thousand strong, moved in two columns, and its wings, with their clouds of foragers, swept the land as with a besom of destruction. In front and on the flanks Wheeler hovered with his small force of cavalry, driving back the foragers, striking a blow wherever it was possible, but far too weak to offer battle. His little band made a heroic but often futile fight across the country. Ray wrote Cicely of the devastation the invaders left behind them, of the pillaging expeditions of the "bummers," and was thankful that she and his mother were safe beyond the reach of molestation. From Savannah, whither Hardee had hastened to

garrison that city, her father also wrote his satisfaction that the line of march would not include Pinehurst or its neighbouring plantations. So Cicely and her household, who had watched through the October days with such anxiety, felt themselves secure, and thought with troubled sympathy of those unfortunate enough to be in the path of the invaders.

But one day, when Dick and Jimmy had gone farther than usual searching for nuts, they came flying home again, their pony stretching to the ground, bringing the startling news that there was a great smoke over toward Aunt Hinton's, and that the big road was full of Yankees. Instantly everybody understood and the house was full of hurry and excitement. Each one had some little thing to hide — a watch, a jewel, a wedding ring, for to the foraging soldiers such treasures were the spoils of war.

Jake hastily emptied the resisting contents of a hen coop into a sack, and taking it behind him on Cicely's horse, led the pony and drove the milch cows ahead of him through the rear field to the swamp. All of the household silver not in actual use had long been lost or buried; and now mammy hastily stripped the table of its spoons and forks and thrust them into the capacious bosom of her cotton frock, hiding the evidence of their presence under her shawl. Then folding her arms across the treasure she took her stand in the hall behind Grandma

Houston's high, carved chair. Cicely stood at one arm of the chair, and Dick and Minna at the other, while the other women gathered in a group near the stair. Cicely was very pale and her hands gripped a scroll-like parcel she held with nervous energy. For she wore just under her dress the Houston diamond necklace, brought from Russia by an ancestor who had been minister there, and she knew that the close-fitting gown showed the outlines. But with Aunt Hinton's burning house in her mind, she could not leave it where it had been concealed in the attic; and there had not been time to hide it outside of the house.

In a few minutes the first of the intruders arrived, turning their horses loose to trample the flower garden while they ran up the steps or around to the rear. Leaning on her gold-headed cane, Mrs. Houston rose grandly to meet those who entered; but they paid no attention to the group except to demand the keys, and threaten fire and destruction if all money and treasures were not given up. In ten minutes they were swarming over the house, opening closets and ransacking drawers, while the two groups of women waited below in silence and dread. Already the soldiers were unruly and quarrelsome, for Aunt Hinton had kept a full wine closet, and the contents had not gone to quench the flames of her ruined home; so that when they came back, more bootless than they had expected from their search,

they were in ugly humour. Insolently they demanded the hiding place of the family plate and jewels, and when Grandma Houston, looking up with quiet dignity, asked:

“What do you suppose men like you have left us to hide during the past three years?” they answered her so roughly that little Dick’s eyes flashed, and Cicely, forgetting the caution she had been schooling herself to practise, cried shame upon them for so addressing an old woman.

The exclamation drew to her the attention of a big foreign-looking fellow, whose insolent eyes, travelling sneeringly over her, first descried the outline of the band of jewels under her frock. His whole face glowed covetously, and with a coarse word as to its hiding place he commanded her to take it off and surrender it. The girl’s face went deathly white at the rough phrase, but her eyes blazed as she imperiously warned him off, bidding him remember his station. But in a moment the whole gang understood, and surged about her, wolfishly eager to share in the spoils. Their snarling voices made the blood run cold. Grandma Houston staggered to her feet with outstretched hand of warning, and mammy was behind the girl, trembling but furious.

“Back — stand back, all of you!” Cicely had stepped back until her shoulder was against the high, carved chair, but there was no sign of surren-

der in her eyes. For a moment the men paused, arrested by the note of command in her voice, and in the pause mammy's sibilant whisper could be heard.

"Gi' it to 'em, honey; gi' it to 'em! Doan let 'em hurt you."

The big soldier, with an insolent air, stepped forward, his hand outstretched.

"Don't you touch me! — don't you *dare* touch me!"

Again the man stopped; it was hard to disregard the majesty of womanhood that spoke in those words. Then quickly Cicely did what her father had bidden as a last resort; the little scroll-like parcel in her hand flashed open, and over her young breast she spread a Mason's apron.

"Is there no one here with manhood enough to know the protection this commands?"

But either there was none of the order among them, or else Aunt Hinton's wine had made them too dull to remember; for after a moment they began to press nearer, growling like angry animals, and the big, dark one made to snatch the apron away; but his hand never reached the edge of it, for from the steps came a voice as of thunder:

"Hold — stand back there!" And from between the fluted columns and into the hall sprang a tall young officer who caught the man by the collar and wheeled him about with such fury that for a moment

the amazed women thought he meant to run him through with the naked sword in his hand. But, with a fierce outcry against war upon women, he dragged the drunken wretch to the door and flung him to the porch. Then wheeling with a quick salute that Cicely knew was for the Masonic symbol rather than for her, and looking straight at Grandma Houston, he said:

"I trust you will believe it was not by my order that you have been molested. These men found wine at a house above here, and strayed from the road."

Down the hall Marie had given a glad cry of delight: "My captain, my captain!" but no one noticed her.

"We thank you for your timely interference," said Grandma Houston, with her beautiful courtesy, although her old voice shook with the emotion of the scene. Cicely stepped a little nearer to add her thanks, but at that moment there was a great cry without, and one of the maids rushed in, screaming:

"The house is on fire — they have set the house on fire!" and in a moment everything was in confusion, the women screaming, the soldiers snatching at the bundles of loot they had collected. But with a quick bound Cicely was in front of the officer, the apron on her breast rising and falling with the quick beating of her heart.

"In the name of *this*," she said, touching the

garment. "The house is the only shelter of a loyal Mason's feeble old mother."

For one flashing moment his eyes looked into hers with recognition, then again he saluted — not the symbol alone this time — and wheeling toward the men, his sword cut the air with a sharp gesture of command. "Attention! Get buckets, tubs, anything, but fight that fire, and fight like hell! Follow! — double-quick!" And with a tramp and rush that shook the walls, they were after him through the door.

In ten minutes the fire was quenched, only the left wing of the big building having caught. Then, while the sullen soldiers corralled their horses on the lawn, the officer, cap in hand, sprang up the steps to where Cicely and her grandmother stood between the fluted columns to thank him.

"This time it is even more than a *special service*, it is a positive salvation," the girl said, thus recalling their last meeting, and letting him read her deep appreciation in her eyes.

"And it was the misconduct of my men, not a rebel funeral," he answered, showing his own memory of their former meeting. "Was any member of your family personally molested before I arrived?"

"No one."

He was very sorry, he explained, but he would have to search the house for concealed arms and

rebel refugees; it was positive orders; he hoped he had the ladies' permission?

Mrs. Houston told him the house was open to him, and while a detail of men under his corporal, with strict orders as to their conduct, made the detour of the big rooms and halls, he still stood between the fluted columns bareheaded, holding Marie's hand, and told them something of public news, and let his eyes stray oftener to the girl than to her proud old grandmother; for Cicely's face, under the spell of excitement, was good to look at.

"So, after all, you did not see your last Yankee at Lovejoy's — I heard what you said to the boy."

"No. And it seems very strange that you should again be the one I meet — to whom I am so deeply indebted."

"I am afraid I must acknowledge that it was the Masonic apron I first served, for I saw it before I did your face. Say to your father that although we may shoot each other on the battlefield, and ask no questions and know no compunction, yet this," with a gesture toward the apron which she now wore pinned about her waist, "will always serve as a flag of truce in the hands of defenceless women."

"Will you not give us your name that my father may know who befriended us in our need?"

He laughed: "No; you will recall me as one of

Sherman's hated fighters; it is not necessary to be able to single me out by name. Your father is — is — ?”

“With General Hardee in Savannah.”

“And have you a brother who is also a soldier? I imagine all the family as fighting.”

“Yes; you may possibly have come in contact with him, for he rides with Wheeler.” The man on the step below knew that he had never seen such wonderful, luminous eyes; something stirred within him.

“And perhaps — I do not mean to be presumptuous — there is also a — lover?”

Her gaze met his steadily: “Any man who won my favour would have to fight for the South.”

“It goes without saying that he *does* fight, and bravely.” He bowed like a courtier.

Grandma Houston cleared her throat, disapproving of the scene, but there was no resentment in the girl's eyes, only a strange quiver that made the man-heart of him wonder. She was seeing, as she often saw in fancy, that slender, steadfast figure with his country's colours above him, with the enemy before and his comrades far behind.

The searching party returned, reporting nothing found, and were ordered to join the rest of the squad in the avenue and begin the onward march. While the order was being given, Cicely leaned over the side balustrade and plucked a late rose a-bloom in

the sheltered nook, a red blossom so widely blown that its golden heart was left to view. When she turned back the man on the step below was watching her, and with a tingle of annoyance she felt herself flush. He held up his hand.

"Will you give it to me — for memory?"

Again Grandma Houston coughed with sharp disapproval, and again the girl took no heed, for after a momentary hesitation she leaned down and dropped the flower upon his palm.

"Yes, but it is my memory it shall symbol, for on every petal you shall read the record of my gratitude that you saved me from — that man's touch!"

She shuddered suddenly, closing her eyes, and something of her emotion communicated itself to him, for his teeth shut hard. It was as if he saw those coarse fingers at her delicate throat.

"It was the greatest good fortune of my life that I was in time. Believe me, the fellow shall realize the enormity of his affront."

"I insist that you give us your name, that my son may know whom to thank when this war is over," said Mrs. Houston, purposely interrupting the conversation between them, and glancing reprehensively at Cicely.

He paused a moment, then laughed: "Since you insist, I am Captain Allyn Fairlee, of the Sixth Connecticut."

The old lady bowed, saluting him formally by his title and giving her own name. "The Johnsons of Stratford in your state are blood relatives of my late husband," she said, her love of genealogy bubbling up.

He answered politely that he knew the family, but his glance strayed from her face. Out beyond the scarlet line of verbena beds his men had mounted; but still he lingered, looking up at the girl above him.

"This is the only spoils of war I shall take away from your beautiful Southland," he said, lifting the rose toward his lips with a daring movement in spite of Grandma Houston's tapping cane and impatient frown; but as he touched it, the wide petals fell suddenly away and were whirled out to the grass by a passing breeze. With the stamen-tipped calyx still in his fingers he looked into the dark eyes.

"Am I to assume that your memory of my service will be as short lived as the petals that were to symbol it?"

"No, the record was too frail to bear such weight of gratitude from me and my household," she answered.

"And there is nothing more substantial that I may take with me? — you know it was to speak your gratitude."

She hesitated, glancing with doubtful quest back into the hall. Then suddenly she bent over

and unpinned from grandma's cap a little bow of soft gray ribbon. The old lady put up a quick, protesting hand, but she gave it no obedience.

"Here are my colours; you will find them unfading enough. Will you wear this?" She dared him with her dark eyes and the smile of her mutinous red mouth, and unhesitatingly he caught it from her fingers.

"As *your* colours, not your country's," he said; then over his shoulder called out the order for the squad to start. "But there is another like it," he added, glancing at the cap; "while I am wearing this, may I not think of the other as on your own breast?"

Before Grandma Houston, astonished and outraged by the suggestion, could prevent, Cicely had plucked the ribbon from over her other ear.

"To wear the colours of Dixie is as much happiness as could come to me," she cried.

"They shall be as a sign between us," he said, holding the ribbons together a moment; "as the broken coin old-time people divided and kept as pledge of faith. There may be a time during this war when we shall need each other — remember, I serve you as knight of old at the summons of this."

"And if you ever send that back to me with call for aid, no queen ever honoured a signet ring more loyally than I will honour that, remembering your service of this day."

They were both laughing, speaking the high-turned phrases with the elaborate politeness, the bows and courtesies of the days of powder and patches, but Grandma Houston was scandalized, and kept trying to interrupt them and reclaim her filched decorations. He went down the steps backward, with some bright sally or courtly phrase thrown back from each landing, and catching his bridle leaped into the saddle.

"After the war is done, I will send this back with its match in blue," he said, touching the shining bit of ribbon on his coat. And then with a great sweep of his cap he was away, clattering down the avenue gold-powdered with the sunset, to join the sulky troopers.

Jake came and rolled Grandma Houston's chair into the house, but the girl stood a long time between the high, white columns, gazing out over the landscape where, royal purple and crimson and ochre, the banners of capitulating day were flying high above the pines.

CHAPTER VI

REDEEMING THE PLEDGE

"As a queen her signet ring!"

WITHIN an hour the gray ribbon that had fluttered on the Federal captain's coat as he rode away to join his men came back to Cicely. In the dusk there was a sound of rapid galloping down the avenue, and the faces of the women, gathered about the supper table, went white with the dread of a fresh invasion. But it was only the sergeant who had led the searching party through the house. He put a bit of gray silk into Cicely's hand.

"Captain Fairlee sent it. There was a quarrel over a piece of booty and a revolt against his commands. It was the big, dark fellow — he had not forgiven the captain for the loss of your necklace; and he resisted the new order, and in the shadow of the road fired —— "

"Purposely?"

"He claimed it was an accident, but the bullet went straight, for Captain Fairlee was struck."

"What a shame to kill him like that!" cried Minna, her voice shaking.

"He was not killed, but will probably die before midnight," replied the sergeant, evidently much affected by his chief's condition. "The bullet struck him in the shoulder, and he is lying under a tree about a mile up the road." Then he turned to Cicely: "He sent the ribbon, and his own horse for you to ride; will you come and take his farewell to his people — he said you would understand the message of the ribbon."

Everybody cried out against it, and Mrs. Houston's cane struck the floor in sharp denial: "It is out of the question that my granddaughter — that any young woman should go among those rough soldiers, and at such an hour!"

"Madame, I have a daughter of my own, and I will be responsible for the young lady if she will come," replied the sergeant. "The man who revolted is bound hand and foot, and the others, who are really much attached to the captain, are under control. There cannot be the slightest danger. Besides, I have brought a second horse for any one the lady wishes to take as escort — it was the captain's orders."

Something in the man inspired confidence. Cicely fingered the silken loop he had brought her: "I promised, and I shall go, grandma."

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Mrs. Clinch caught her arm: "Cicely, you must not! Ray would not wish it."

"Ray would not wish me to refuse the dying request of a man who had befriended us as this man did to-day."

"It may be some plot — some trick." But Mrs. Clinch did not believe her own suggestion, and even grandma shook her head.

"It is the truth," replied Cicely. "The sergeant pledges the honour of his own daughter for my safety, and I am willing to trust him — I shall take Jake and Dick on the other horse, grandma; and I shall return as quickly as possible." And in the face of all remonstrance she went galloping away in the deepening dusk. She was not afraid, and the only analysis she gave her motives was to say over and over: "As a queen would honour her signet ring!"

The ride was swift and short, and presently she drew rein in the circle of firelight that showed the troopers sitting or standing, and that one prostrate figure under the pine. Out beyond the firelight were tethered the animals gathered in the raid — horses and mules for the army wagons, and cattle for the commissary. It was thus the foragers fed the marching host, leaving the country people starving in their rear.

Cicely waved off the sergeant and slipped unaided to the ground. "I have come," she said, kneeling

beside the wounded captain, and touched the two ribbons pinned to her dress.

"I knew you would. I — am done for. God! to die at the hands of an assassin, and — not — on the field!" He spoke with difficulty and great bitterness.

"Your commander will be told of the cowardly deed, and the assassin will meet his rightful end."

"It is not that. I was — not thinking of — of vengeance. I wanted to — win — distinction, and — to serve the Union." The pain silenced him, it was so terrible. She waited, watching the twitching face. After a minute he opened his eyes again: "You will write them — in Connecticut? — address — in pocket. And — and will you give me a grave — somewhere on your land until — they send — for me after — the war?"

"I will do both if it is necessary. I promise."

He almost smiled, but his voice sank to a whisper, "And — will you put the ribbon on my coat — I — I have a fancy to — take it with me."

"You are not going to die," she answered impetuously; but the sergeant touched her arm, whispering, "He cannot possibly recover. It is imperative that we move at once and rapidly, every minute of delay increases our danger. The loss of blood from the quick riding will exhaust him in an hour, he is too nearly spent from it now."

"But he is not going with you — he could not, like that. You will leave him with us to be nursed."

The man stared, then shook his head: "We could not do that."

"Why not?"

"For several reasons; but principally because we could not run the risk of having him fall into the hands of the rebels, which would happen if we left him out of our ranks."

"Did you not say he would die within the hour if you took him? And would it not be better for him to be a live prisoner than a dead man within your lines?"

"Yes, but —— "

"He may not be captured — there is the chance. And he will have good care in my house; you need not doubt it. He saved me from insult to-day, and no woman ever forgets such an obligation."

The sergeant hesitated, but the troopers behind him were impatient. "You are right; he would die with us, his one chance is with you," he said at last.

She stood up, taking command of the situation with the authority that comes of long supremacy. "Spread that blanket on the ground — here, close to him. Now four of you lift him on to it. Sergeant, do you hold the wounded shoulder. Be very careful, all of you. Ready? Gently, gently! There! Now, each of you take a corner up tightly.

Yes, you will carry him back to the house this way. Two of you bring some of those pine splinters for torches, so those who carry him may not stumble. He must be jarred as little as possible."

Half an hour later the little procession moved up between the pillars of the veranda; and even Grandma Houston made no outcry of objection when she saw the face of the man in the blood-stained blanket.

"Tell your general that a Southern girl whom he protected pledges her word that no harm shall come to him as long as she and her family can shield him."

The sergeant, now in command, accepted her promise, and then hurried away with his troopers, for there was a whisper among the negroes that a band of Confederate scouts had been seen in the neighbourhood, and they had no wish to be cut off from the main army and serve as sacrifices to the fierce spirit of retaliation their ruthless conduct had aroused. They were well satisfied that their wounded officer would not live through the night, and he would certainly die more comfortably in a Southern bed than on the bare Southern ground. The only responsibility that devolved on them now was to save their booty and their own skins, and they did not spare their horses as they rode away into the night.

"But where are we to put him?" asked Mrs.

Clinch, as the women gathered about the still figure in the blanket on the hall floor.

"I do not know," said Mrs. Houston thoughtfully. "Every room in the house is full."

"No; there is one room vacant," Cicely answered, looking up from where she and Minna were trying to force a little brandy between the shut lips of the soldier. "Jake, go up and open the rose-room."

There was an instantaneous and general outcry: "Oh, Cicely, not there, not there!"

"Why not? It is nothing but superstition in us that keeps the room closed; a foolish superstition, which we ought to dissipate. Go at once and move the wardrobe from before the door, Jake; and, mammy, make the bed and have a fire lighted. Do not stand looking at me; I mean what I say."

"Missy, honey, you knows de sayin' 'bout dat room — dat he who sleep dar gwine brek de heart er de young mistis er de house — doan do it, honey, doan do it! Put 'im somewhar's else — you know de sayin' done been proved."

"I have heard the story often enough, mammy; but this young mistis is not afraid of her heart — that is safe enough." For was not Ray's picture up stairs on her mantel?

"I do not approve of the plan, my child," said grandma; "this man is an alien, an enemy — "

Cicely glanced at the blue coat of the swooning

man, and her face hardened. What animosity to her country it typified! Then she looked up at the walls, which but for his efforts would not now be standing: "We must do the best we can for him, Grandma Houston — father would wish it; and so would Ray, Cousin Maria."

And while she and Minna, under the old lady's direction, still kept up their efforts at restoration, Jake and mammy went up stairs to the room, which, through some whim of the architect, had been so cleverly built into the angle of the right wing, and whose door was so completely hidden by the big wardrobe in the hall, as to make it as a secret chamber in some olden castle. And thither, presently, Jake, Big Ben, and the gardener carried the still unconscious officer; and Cicely, mammy, and old Doctor Watson watched by him through the night.

The next morning Cicely's and Grandma Houston's first thought was for Aunt Hinton and Lena; and with the wounded captain's horse — which his troopers had left behind — harnessed with one of the few mules spared from the raid of the day before, Cicely and Minna drove to the next plantation.

They found the two women in one of the negro cabins with what household stuff they had been able to save.

"The house was fired in the rear while the officer

was in front," said Mrs. Hinton. "We would have lost everything had he not ordered his men to bring out the furniture from the lower floor. He reprimanded the man who used the torch, putting him under arrest; and he stayed after his soldiers started, to help Lena put her father's medicine chest where it would be safe. I suppose that is why he was so late reaching your house." Then looking back, as they drove away toward Pinehurst, to the still smoking heap of rubbish where the heirlooms and accumulated treasures of a lifetime had made an enemy's bonfire, she began to sob: "Oh, this war, this cruel war — when will it be over?"

That first day and night the Yankee captain lay in that dull stupor of exhaustion from excessive loss of blood; but the next afternoon he opened his eyes understandingly, yet with a queer wonder as to his surroundings.

Above him the rose-satin bed canopy spread a charming glow of colour, and beyond that was a ceiling where rosy cupids sported upon clouds of dawn-hour brightness. The window curtains were of the same hue as the canopy, and the furniture was polished mahogany that reflected the dancing flicker of the wood fire on the hearth. At the foot of the bed an old lady dozed in a high carved chair, upholstered in the bright damask of the draperies; but a girl by the window was looking at him with

grave eyes. For some time neither of them spoke; she was letting him gather up the dropped threads of the past two days. And it was her face that at last crystallized his thoughts into a memory.

"I am in your house?"

"Yes."

"How did I get here?"

For answer she drew into view the rose-bright draperies of the bed tester and pointed to two pieces of gray ribbon pinned there:

"Each of us was to answer the call of the other, if danger or necessity arose. You called first."

He glanced at his bandaged arm: "Yes; there was a fight, and some one fired. Tell me everything."

"There is not much to tell. You sent me the ribbon, believing yourself to be dying. We brought you here from the roadside, your sergeant leaving you because to move you on horseback was to kill you outright. This is the second day you have been here. Our old doctor took the ball from your shoulder, and you are going to get well."

"Will I lose my arm?"

"Oh, no; now you must go to sleep and not talk any more."

He obeyed her as to his silence, but half an hour later, when she looked up from her book, she found his glance travelling from corner to corner of the

room, dwelling with appreciation on the furniture and with admiration on the portrait of Great-aunt Cicely that hung over the mantel. Then he looked at Grandma Houston, sleeping placidly in her chair, her high-bred face framed by the lace ruffles of her cap. Finally his eyes met Cicely's, and the satisfaction in them was complete.

"If a man does not get well here, there is no potency in environment," he said, and fell quietly asleep.

The next day, as she measured his medicine by the table at the head of his bed, he said: "I did not imagine when we made that contract with the two ribbons that I would be the one to benefit by it. I thought probably in these troubled times, some further molestation might come to you — you are so quick and fearless in expressing yourself — and possibly I might be of use to you."

"And to me the compact meant nothing. I looked on it merely as a pretty, passing fancy in which to humour, for the moment, the man who had saved the roof over our heads."

"And yet how kindly and quickly you met your promise, given though it was in jest."

"A promise even lightly given is not to be disregarded."

And he came to find that this was one of the keynotes of her character — a loyalty that knew no faltering.

That night she wrote to Ray:

This wounded soldier, left thus in our care, has described to us the inequality of Sherman's and Hardee's forces—the terrible odds against us in this seemingly unending struggle.

Oh, but the days are long, so long with my dear ones fighting against such an overwhelming host! Where there is even one chance of victory, hope keeps down the gnawing horror and distrust; but what is there of peace left for us women when we know our men are outnumbered three to one, and the toils are daily closing about you? Each morning I ask myself: Are they all free, is any one of them a prisoner in the hold of the enemy? And at night I cry: Are they all alive?

I sent you to the war, Ray. Come back to me well and unharmed, or I think my heart will break. I am waiting for you, waiting, waiting!

CHAPTER VII

THE COMING OF THE REBELS

"Curious fool, be still;
Is human love the growth of human will?"

THE days went by like waking dreams to Allyn Fairlee, lying under the tester of the mahogany bed. In and out of his sick room a dozen times a day Cicely went on her light feet, but never alone. Mammy came with her, or Grandma Houston sat in state beside the fireplace, or Lena and Minna shared her vigil. Often the three girls speculated as to his life and friends as they watched him sleeping

"Does he ever speak of his mother, Cicely?" asked Lena.

"Sometimes. He lost her long ago."

"And of course he does not confide his love secrets to you," whispered Minna. "I think it was so romantic that he should be the very same officer you had seen before; it's just like a story out of a book. If it wasn't for Ray and that very acute conscience of yours, you might have a lovely little affair with him while he is getting well."

"You forget a third and an equally insurmountable obstacle."

"What is that?"

"His uniform. No one who wears that could occupy my thoughts except on tolerance. He is of the enemy. And besides, even if I were given to 'affairs,' he probably has a sweetheart at home to whom it is possible he might be loyal."

"Oh, I don't mean anything serious for you or for him — just one of those touch-and-go flirtations that do to tell your grandchildren about. Like this," and her voice fell into the quaver of an old woman's: "'That letter, my child? That was written me by a Yankee captain whom I nursed during the war some forty years ago. Did he love me? Well, well, it isn't for me to say; but I wasn't old and wrinkled in those days; and men will be foolish, my dear — very foolish.' There might be a whole romance packed behind those words, and there might be nothing but a few doses of quinine."

"Minna, you are incorrigible!"

"All old ladies tell stories like that to their grandchildren. Why, Grandma Houston is seventy-eight, but she actually blushed the other day when I found, under the velvet lining of her old jewel case, a sheet of paper written full of love verses in fady, long-ago ink. When I asked her where she got it, she replied with quite a tremor in her voice, that 'a friend of her youth had written them to her.'"

Cicely leaned forward, mischief in her eyes: "Is that all she said?"

"Oh, no; the usual reproof came immediately after." For Minna, oftener than any one else, drew the fire of the old lady's criticism. "When she had recovered from her spell of sentimental memory she said" — and the mimicry was so perfect that the voice seemed grandma's very own — "'Minna, my dear, you have a very prying way about you. Pray remember that no true Houston ever asks personal questions.'"

The girls laughed so that they wakened the sleeper, for whose entertainment Minna repeated the last part of the conversation.

"Some of these days grandma is going to catch you mimicking her, and there will be real trouble," said Lena warningly. But Cicely patted the plump, dimpled hand.

"Grandma Houston's scolding is only a blind for her pride in you, Minna; she is always quoting your bright speeches behind your back."

"Which isn't much consolation for the drubbing she gives me to my face."

Cicely left nothing undone that was for Fairlee's comfort; but somehow he always felt there was a barrier between them, something subtle and intangible, but something that would not be dissipated. Minna laughed frankly with him, and Lena lost her shyness when she found he could give

her advice about the art work she loved so much. But with Cicely it was different. If at times he lamented the trouble he gave her, she pointed to the ribbons fluttering from the edge of the bed curtain, reminding him of their compact; and if he protested that he was too much of a burden in her crowded household she replied that but for him there would be no house and they would all be camping beside a heap of ashes. Always she met him thus, with disarming courtesy, and yet with a quiet aloofness of manner that he could not overcome. Only now and then when she sat in the firelight and he told her of his home — of his dead mother and lonely boyhood — did he catch, for himself, a gleam of the womanly tenderness with which she treated her grandmother or old mammy. He came gradually to watch for those rare moments, adroitly changing the subject sometimes to bring them about. And sometimes in the dark he would reach out and touch the ribbons that hung on the tester curtain, comforting his loneliness with the knowledge that here at least was one bond between her and "the stranger within her gates." Often he asked himself what was the fascination this girl had for him, apart from her beauty. Both of her cousins were more friendly, both of them more cordial. Was it a sense of dependence that made him watch for Cicely, the ordinary and not infrequent fancy of the invalid for his nurse? But he knew that be-



tween the two months that had intervened since her departure from Atlanta he had not ceased to wonder as to her whereabouts and her safety. Once or twice he had even asked for the command of foraging parties for no other reason than the memory of her eyes and the possibility of seeing her again. He had not exactly hunted her — his action had hardly been that pronounced since he had known only her first name and nothing whatever of her destination when they separated at Lovejoy Station. But he was clearly conscious that he had never lost the thought — and perhaps the hope — of seeing her once more.

When the fever from the wound began to subside the sick room was kept less quiet. Marie often leaned on the side of the bed with her dolls, listening to some story of his far-away home where the snows were already whitening on the hills, and Dick and Jimmy were allowed to take down his sword and look at it with boyish envy, while Cicely sewed by the table, and over under the window-light Lena made pictures of them with her clever pencil. These were the hours that Fairlee liked best, the times when he felt closest to the home life about him. On one of these occasions when mammy came for Marie to go to bed and she made her round of the group with her good nights, he stretched out his sound arm:

“Will you not kiss me, too Marie? I have

not had anybody kiss me good night in four years."

"Isn't you any little girls at your house?"

"No; when I am at home I live all alone."

"Dracious! but you must be mighty lonesome!" the child replied, her sympathy aroused, and put up her mouth for his salute — the rose of a mouth that had mocked him on the Atlanta street.

Down stairs Dick took her sharply to task for permitting the caress; "You're a nice one, ain't you? Kissing Yankees while your own papa is fighting 'em with General Hardee!"

For a moment the child was distressed with the thought of a wrong to her papa, and her eyes began to fill. Then she compromised — Marie always compromised when defeat seemed imminent: "I don't b'lieve he's a Yankee now, 'cause he ain't got any blue clo'es; he's just our sick man."

And when Minna told Fairlee of the answer the next day, he laughed with genuine pleasure.

"Marie is a diplomat," he said. "But Dick would not begrudge me a good night now and then if he knew how lonely I often am. I never realized before the last two weeks the beauty and sweetness of close family relations, for I was an only child, and orphaned early in life."

One day mammy's bungling fingers failed to arrange comfortably the bandage that held his arm, and Cicely, seeing how white his face was under the

mistake, put the old woman impetuously aside and finished the task herself. As she straightened up from her stooping position, after it was done, he said:

"How much trouble I give you, Miss Houston! As soon as I am able to be moved you must send me on to the field hospital."

She looked at him a moment doubtfully:

"Would they care for you better there?"

For the first time since he had been in the house he caught her hand: "Away from you I shall not even remember to care for myself."

For a moment her surprised glance held his, then she drew her fingers quietly away: "The fever must be rising again, you seem a little — excited."

"Yes, perhaps it is the fever — some sort of fever madness in my blood," he answered, letting her hand slip from his.

Neither of them ever referred to the scene; but after that it was always Grandma Houston or Aunt Hinton who held his wrist to count the fever beats. She read to him in the mornings, however, as usual; and in the twilights she sat in grandma's high-backed chair, with the leaping firelight about her, and repeated to him any news that had drifted to them, or fought with him spirited word-battles as to the cause and conduct of the war, or else let him tell her stories of his childhood or life at West Point; while, opposite her, mammy's fingers worked auto-

matically at her knitting, and Dick nursed the sword on the rug. Once her face was very white and stern as she told him that a party of foraging Federals had stripped her fields of the year's produce, and had fired the Howard house after searching it for heirlooms of plate and jewels; and he made no attempt to justify or excuse such marauding tactics; only, he said, the leaders did not give such orders; it was the common soldiers who were to blame.

One morning when he had been in the rose-room two weeks, he was alone and for something better to do was studying the portrait over the mantel — Cicely's great-aunt, for whom she was named — when suddenly there was a great commotion below, a champing of bits and stamping of hoofs at the door, quick striding steps with ring of spurs in the hall, and joyful cries throughout the house. He could hear the women's light steps run down the stair, and could even distinguish names cried out in the rapture of surprise.

"It is the rebels!" he said, under his breath. "God! have they beaten us — has Sherman failed in his march?"

It seemed to him it was an age that he lay there alone, waiting; though in reality it was not more than fifteen minutes. Then there was a spur-jingling footstep on the stair, and two voices that gradually grew into articulate speech.

"I am very sorry, but we must take him — it's orders."

"And I tell you that you shall not touch him, I have already explained to you how ill he is. It would be death to move him."

The second voice was Cicely's. Fairlee stiffened under the bedclothes; it had always been an even chance in his thoughts whether his own men would return and take him to the safety of his camp or whether the enemy would find him. And now it was to be a Southern prison. He turned the bed spread back from his breast and waited. There were now other jingling steps on the stair, and the voices were growing sharp with the argument.

"But, Miss Houston, we have our orders."

"I do not care for your orders; I know what is humane."

Then suddenly Cicely stood in the open door, her back to the room, facing those without; her hands, stretching to either lintel, barred the way.

"I forbid you to enter this room!" Beyond her Fairlee saw the gray caps of three Confederate soldiers.

"Miss Houston, you must be reasonable; we ——"

"I am reasonable; I have told you that you shall not touch him; he is my prisoner and I will keep him. I sent General Sherman my word that no harm should come to him."

"We are specially sent to gather in all stragglers and left-behinds of the Federal army that they may not harass the women and children. For this purpose we rode many miles to turn Sherman's flank and get to the rear. I believe it was your own father who suggested the move, knowing the unprotected condition of the country."

"It was like him — always thinking of others!" the girl's voice broke with a glad sob. "But tell him that this one of Sherman's fighters protected his daughter from insult and saved the house over his mother's head; and he will know no other woman need fear him."

"We will carry your message, and no doubt it will secure special clemency for this one of our prisoners; but General Hardee's commands ——"

But still Cicely held them back; "You shall not enter; I have said it. Go, bring your superior officer to me. There, I hear his horse at the door."

After one more expostulation the men went tramping down the stairs.

"Cicely!" Never before had Fairlee so called her. He saw the quick movement of her lithe body as she realized the word. Then she looked over her shoulder. He was struggling to sit up.

"Lie down!" she commanded quickly and sharply. "Do you want to undo all our nursing of these two weeks? Lie down!"

He fell back obediently on the pillow, but he said

in a voice that set her nerves to tingling: "Let them take me; they are right — they must obey orders, they have no other choice."

"We have no prison fit for men as ill as you are." Her back was still to him, and she did not turn her head as she spoke.

"Perhaps not, but that does not lessen their obligation. I cannot see you annoyed — let them take me; I shall always know you wanted to save me; it will be the crowning gladness of my whole life to remember that; for — I love you!"

She was as still as a statue; not one muscle of her body seemed to him to move; was she angry that one of Sherman's followers, an unknown pensioner upon her pity, had dared to so address her? In the silence a desolate sense of isolation came to him.

"Of course I had no right to say that. I am sorry to offend you ——"

A voice from below interrupted him, a man's voice, glad, imperiously eager:

"Cicely!"

The girl started violently, and the hand which had still leaned upon the door facing dropped to her side.

"Cicely! Sweetheart — where are you?"

The owner of the voice was coming up the stair two steps at a time. The girl turned her head for one inscrutable glance at the man on the bed behind her, then, without so much as a word, she was out of sight to meet the newcomer.

CHAPTER VIII

"CONSIDER YOURSELF MISS HOUSTON'S PRISONER"

"For words are fetters, strong as bands of steel" —
Anon.

AH, I have found you!' Fairlee knew that the two in the hall had met, and a spasm of jealousy seized him. Sweetheart! who had a right to call her sweetheart? And why were they so still? Why did they not talk? Why did they not move? And — God in heaven! — was the man kissing her out there in the silence of the hall? Who was he that he dared? Ah, if he were only not so helpless!

At last the silence was ended; they were talking, he could hear the low murmur of voices but not the words, except one sentence spoken by the man in a high key and with the inflection of surprise, perhaps annoyance.

"The rose-room!"

She did most of the talking. For more than five interminable minutes by the mantel clock the murmur went on, first one voice, then the other. And then at last he knew that they were coming.

He was holding her hand when they came through the door — a slight, straight figure but little taller than she, with a smooth, handsome, delicate face. The hair under the gray cap was soft and black, and his cheeks were thin as though he had suffered. Something in the dark eyes that were so like Cicely's quenched the bitterness in Fairlee's breast — something that claimed and gave respect.

"Captain Fairlee, this is my cousin, Lieutenant Clinch."

The breath that Fairlee caught was as deep as a sob; so it was only a kinsman after all; he had heard how clannishly these Southerners loved their own.

"My cousin has told me of the invaluable service you rendered her and my other relatives. We wear different uniforms, Captain Fairlee, but we are both men with the same powers of appreciation, and I wish to thank you on my own behalf."

Fairlee took the extended hand: "My service to Miss Houston is offset by hers to me — she has nursed me back to life."

The dark eyes of the young Confederate were on her glowingly. "Any man whom Cicely nursed would make a game fight to keep on living, and yet be sorry to get well," he said gallantly. He asked after the captain's wound, its extent and progress toward healing; then, to Fairlee's satisfaction, fell to telling them the war news. Sherman was near-

ing Savannah, but Hardee was there to hold the city. Beauregard and the governor of the state had issued calls to the people to rise *en masse* to crush the invaders, and a large force would soon be in the field. This would coöperate with Wheeler's cavalry, and their destruction was inevitable.

"And then, Captain Fairlee, Cicely may send you back to Connecticut with a New Year's greeting to your mother and — your sweetheart; and we fellows down here are coming home to ours." He caught the girl's hand and swung it boyishly, and she did not withdraw it.

The man on the bed turned his head and looked out of the window; under the edge of the counterpane his nails were biting at his palms: "I have no mother and no sweetheart waiting for me in the North, Lieutenant Clinch," he said quietly; and presently added significantly, "and Sherman has not yet failed to capture Savannah."

Ray frowned, but in a moment the smile had come back to his sensitive, beardless lips: "Your confidence in your general does you credit, but it remains to be verified. And now, Cicely, we must go and hunt my mother; my time is limited. With such a nurse, Captain Fairlee, good wishes for your recovery seem superfluous."

The Federal officer raised himself on his elbow: "Am I to consider myself your prisoner, Lieutenant Clinch?"

Ray turned at the door, hesitating: "The most harrowing rumours have reached our lines of the treatment of women and children by Sherman's 'bummers.' You can imagine our resentment; and I have been sent back by General Wheeler, acting under orders from General Hardee, to gather up all stragglers from the Union ranks and free the women from this persecution."

"But, Ray, Captain Fairlee is not a straggler."

His eyes lighted as they did each time they fell on her face. "I was going to say that he did not come under that description." He turned toward the bed: "Not only are you not a menace to the peace of our women, but you are a positive protection to this house, for surely the kindness you receive here will protect its inmates from any further molestation. So, instead of taking you with the stragglers I have captured and have in the yard below, I shall leave you here to finish recovering. You may consider yourself Miss Houston's prisoner — and the whole Confederate army will envy you your jailer!"

He laughed and held out his hand to the girl, who put hers into it, and without turning her head answered lightly:

"Captain Fairlee knows already what a rigorous keeper I am when it comes to medicine and nourishment."

"Well, I will tell General Wheeler that he is in

your care and that you are responsible for him, both as to medicine and good conduct. Your word will be his hostage."

Allyn tried hard to see her eyes, but she went away without looking at him. As they passed out of the door Ray lifted her hand to his lips.

"Cicely, sweet, can you even faintly guess what the sight of you is after all these months in camp?"

In the hall below the whole household had assembled to wait on the soldiers and to hear the latest news of friends and relatives; and there was a jargon of voices and laughter, with now and then the ring of a spur or the clatter of a sabre as the men moved about. Grandma Houston sat in her carved chair talking to an old soldier as he sipped a cup of the coffee mammy was serving from the side table. Minna, who, at the first rumour of approaching gray-jackets, had flown to her mirror to look to her hair and neck ribbon, was holding a little court in the bay window. Around her were half a dozen soldiers, all vying with each other for the smiles that dimpled about her lips and the arch glances that shot from her hazel eyes. The only scowling face in her train was Joe Howell's; he had tried in vain to entice her into the library for a few private words, but she was too much the coquette to yield admiration in the aggregate for love making in the concrete. On the stair landing Ray and Cicely

passed Lena and a young private — a neighbour — who was trying to coax a glint of love light into her serious blue eyes.

"Be good to him, Lena. He has fought like a hero since you saw him last," Ray laughed as he passed them. He did not notice the little tremor that caught the corners of the girl's mouth, for his eyes were on Cicely, and his fingers were tightening over the ones in his grasp. But she hastily withdrew her hand.

"We are behaving like a couple of children," she said. "Let us find your mother."

But he stopped her on the bottom step: "How long do you suppose your Yankee prisoner will take to get well?"

"Doctor Watson hopes he will be up in another week, if there is no further complication."

"That is too long and too soon — too long to trouble you with his nursing; too soon, because Sherman will still be hammering at Savannah, and he may slip away to help. Try and keep him at least two weeks, and he will be too late to aid in any mischief."

"You really think General Hardee can hold Savannah?"

"Certainly, when the reinforcements the governor has called for reach him."

"But who is to reinforce us? The last levy took even our boys!" She shivered: "I cannot share

your enthusiasm. This triumphant march to the sea ——”

“It was triumphant only because General Wheeler had not men enough to offer battle,” he cried bitterly. “But Savannah must hold out; if not——”

“Our fate is sealed already, Ray. Whether Savannah stands or falls makes very little difference. It is Lee in Virginia on whom our destiny depends, and he is near his end!”

Something, some helpless note of conviction in her voice, held him silent a moment; then he changed the subject.

“In your father’s note he bade me ask about the negroes. How are they behaving? have many of them left the plantation?”

“Yes, some of them have gone with the army. Captain Fairlee says these camp-followers are becoming a burden on Sherman.”

“He could easily break up the following. To rid himself of them, Kilpatrick took up his pontoon bridges over one of the swollen streams and basely left the negroes on the far bank to starve or to return to their former owners. Fearing the punishment of such a return and enamoured of the free life of the camp, many of them plunged into the high water and were drowned.”

“Yes; it must have been a pitiful sight. If you can get a message to father let him know that those

of our negroes who remain on the plantation are behaving well."

"I believe it is the case all over the South. If Sherman's bummers behaved as well we would feel very little uneasiness about our women in their unprotected homes. It is when we hear of the conduct of these men ——"

"Don't!" she cried, her hand to her throat. "If it had not been for Captain Fairlee one of those bummers would have handled me roughly."

His eyes were hard as steel: "God! and I not there to save you! Some day it may be in my way to repay Captain Fairlee, and I shall not forget our dear debt to him."

She smiled at him, and instantly his face softened. Just then his mother came from the dining-room with Helen's baby in her arms, and they went to meet her. It was Ray's first sight of the child, and for a few moments he looked at it in silence, tears gathering in his eyes.

"If Sherman had made you fatherless, little one, it would have been the fortune of war; but to make you motherless was the act of a barbarian."

"We are in God's hands, my son," said his mother. "But come closer to the window that I may see you better. Does he look well, Cicely? is he not very thin? Ray, you are taking care of yourself?"

"Care of myself! I have all I can do to look

after my horse and my pistols," he laughed. "You and Cicely must take care of me with your prayers."

"We do that — hourly."

Cicely crossed to the table: "Give me some coffee for Ray, mammy."

"Mighty light-complected fer Pinehurs' coffy," said mammy w th sorrowful dissatisfaction as she poured out a cup. 'But it's gittin' low in de sack, an' I doan know whar we gwine git any mo', wid de country full er Yankees. I's bleege ter save some fer ole miss."

"Yes, and for Captain Fairlee."

The old woman sniffed: "I warn't thinking 'bout him — he ain none er our fo'ks."

"But he is 'the stranger within our gates,'" the girl replied, touching her in her most vulnerable point — her religious convictions. "When you are through here, go up and see if he needs anything; we have been so busy we have neglected him this morning." She gave mammy's shoulder a persuading little pat, and picked up the cup.

Ray was by Grandma Houston's chair.

"Raymond," the old lady was saying, "tell my son that there are eighteen of us here at Pinehurst, and if we have no more raiders to strip us, I think we will have provisions enough to get through the winter. Cicely and Jake have hidden part of the corn and potatoes for seed for the new crop — though the negroes may not plant it, unless Mr.

Lincoln reconsiders his emancipation proclamation."

Ray laughed aloud: "He can't do that, grandma."

"I do not see why," the old lady said, stiffening. "I have been reared to believe that a true gentleman is always ready to repair an injustice, or correct a mistake."

"Mr. Lincoln does not see that he has committed an injustice or made any mistake."

"Perhaps not, as I hear he was of very plain origin. But, Raymond, tell my son to be sure and keep his feet dry. Nothing is more detrimental to health than damp socks."

Behind her back, while the old lady was speaking, Cicely caught a low, hoarse whisper:

"Minna, why do you torture me this way?"

"Torture you? Dear me, Joe, you talk like I was a whole Spanish Inquisition!"

"And so you are — thumb-screws, rack and all, when you flirt like this. There is the bugle blowing 'boots and saddles,' and I haven't had a word with you yet. Don't you care for me any more?"

"How absurd, Joe! Of course I've always been fond of you. Yes, you may have the flower if you do not let any one see it. But, for goodness' sake, don't hold my hand so tight."

Only an hour of rest and love taking and making could the young lieutenant allow his men, and the whole family went out to see them mount.

Even in those last moments Minna did not forget to coquet, for although Joe had her flower safe under his coat, her roving eyes levied tribute of admiration from her other followers. Ray found Cicely by one of the fluted columns, and drew her down the steps. "I have taken a new lease on life with the sight of you, sweetheart."

Up stairs in the rose-room Fairlee heard and welcomed the stir of departure, and lifting himself on his pillows as high as he could, he stared out between the curtains at the narrow wedge of lawn left to his view. The four men tied to their horses he knew were the captured bummers whose fate was already sealed. They would hang for their misconduct before the sunset.

"It is the course of war," he said between his teeth. "Up in Connecticut we would do the same to stragglers who jeopardized our women."

Then he forgot the doomed men, for Minna and her cavaliers moved across the strip of lawn, then came Cicely and Raymond Clinch. How youthful he seemed, how brave and eager in spirit to meet any crisis, how unfitted physically for the strain of camp life. And she—what was the look in her eyes as she stood beside him, her hand on his bridle? The man looking at them from the high window would have given any earthly possession to have read her heart, but even her face was turned from him as she talked. Presently when the little band had mounted and

gathered in the avenue under the pines, he saw Ray bend toward her and, quickly as if he feared rebuff, kiss her on the forehead. Did she shiver away from him? The watcher could not say, but he knew she was not angry, for now that the lieutenant was mounted she detained him to plait a bit of winter honeysuckle in his horse's mane. Ray watched the completion of this, then, cap in hand, he bent his bared head until it almost reached hers, and lifted her fingers to his lips in a last salute. With a clatter of hoofs he was off after the others, still bareheaded, still looking back, smiling into her eyes as she stood in the white sunshine.

She remained where he had left her, one hand on the honeysuckle trellis, the other hanging idly at her side. The rest of the household returned to the porch, talking or silent as their moods dictated, and the lawn was deserted but for that solitary, motionless figure beside the vine. The watcher from the high window knew but one question — was her heart yearning after the young officer who had ridden away? She did not seem to notice that the others had deserted her, and the crisp wind of the Southern winter did not rouse her as it lifted the dark curls of her hair. What a wonderful picture of woman's patience and fortitude she made, looking after her lover who was galloping away at the call of the bugle.

Fairlee fell back on his pillow with a sigh.

CHAPTER IX

MAMMY'S STORY

A room shuttered and closed, where rose leaves mouldered in the drawers, with perfume of an old romance — K.

THE door creaked as Fairlee settled on his pillow, but it was only mammy bringing a tray with his luncheon; and when he looked again through the window the girl was gone from the lawn.

"Coffy ain ver' strong terday," said mammy apologetically. "Dem Mr. Bummers" (she considered it good manners to give Fairlee's "fo'ks" a title in his presence, though she never spoke the title as if it deserved a capital), "dem Mr. Bummers ain lef much in de sto' room, an' I bleege ter keep ernuf for ole miss. She cain drink nuthin' made outen dry raspber'y leaves or burnt sweet 'taters groun' up in de coffy mill lak dey say some fo'ks is doin'."

"It is all right, Mammy Milly," he answered, for he had called her as the family did from the first. "You make it so good that it does not need to be very strong."

By such appreciative words he had won her smile

before, and now he specially wished to put her in a good humour. So he went on as he slowly sipped the contents of the cup: "Nobody ever made me coffee like yours."

"Lordy, chile, I spec yo' ma done made it heap mo' better," she said deprecatingly, her pleasure in her voice.

"She died too long ago."

"An' yo pa's daid too? Ain you got no fo'ks at all?"

"Oh, several cousins; but of course cousins do not count."

"Doan know hoccum dey doan. Dey sho counts down here in Georgy. Jes' as long as dey trace de blood, dey counts it, rich or po'."

"Yes, cousins *do* seem to count here. For instance Lieutenant Clinch — he is Miss Houston's cousin, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir. Kinder way off, 'cause his pa and missy's pa was cousins. But dey done gro' up terger jes lak dey was closer kin."

"They are — they are very fond of each other I suppose?"

"'Co'se dey is, Mr. Cap'un; why, her pa an' his ma done fix it up fer 'em ter marry. Mars Ray been lovin' her sence dey wus teensy weensy chillun. Many's de time he said, whilst I was a-combin' his haid: 'When I'm grown I'll marry Cicely, and you'll live wid us an' mek us ginger cakes cut

out lak horses, mammy.'" She laughed with the memory.

When Fairlee spoke again it was with apparent indifference. "And I suppose she cares just as much for him?"

Mammy straightened and smoothed the counterpane under his chin. "'Tain fer ladies ter love gemmens lak gemmens loves ladies," she said oracularly. Then she put the tray aside, and taking her knitting sat down by the window where she always kept her watch when left in charge of the sick room. Fairlee saw that further questioning would be useless, so after a while he changed the conversation.

"This is a beautiful room; you have often said you would tell me the history of it," he said, after listening in vain for a step on the stair. "Why do they keep it shut up?"

"'Caise it seem lak dere's a sort er spell on it," answered the old woman.

"What kind of a spell?"

"I couldn't say; 'cepen it brings mighty bad luck. Dere's been er heap er sorrow 'bout dis room. I spec dere's been mo' tears cried in here than over all de res' er de house put terger." And her tongue once started, she told him the story of the beautiful apartment.

Four generations of Houstons had lived in the house since the oldest of the "old marsters" had

built it. That builder had had a daughter who was the pride of his life. One summer while at the springs she met a foreigner, a handsome and fascinating Frenchman, who followed her back to Georgia in the autumn, and during his stay in the house he had occupied this room. His wooing went successfully, and the wedding was speedily arranged. The father was not pleased or satisfied, but the girl watched the sewing of her white satin frock with happy eyes. The furniture for the new house had been bought, the wedding guests were bidden, the supper prepared; and then, the night before the ceremony, the groom-elect had climbed out of the window yonder at the head of the bed, using the stout ivy ropes as a ladder, and had fled the country with the younger children's French governess. The enraged father had pursued him as far as New Orleans, meaning to shoot him for his perfidy, but the vessel bearing the culprits had sailed before he arrived. The forsaken bride was stricken with mortification and humiliation, and, refusing to see her friends, spent her time in the rose-room in a deep melancholy that blotted out all thought of the world. Often they found her leaning out of the window through which her lover had gone, looking down the clambering ivy as though she thought to see him clinging to the branches. Before the winter was over they had buried her.

"And the room is kept closed because of the memory of the jilted girl?" Allyn asked, as the old woman stopped to pick up her dropped ball of yarn.

"Dat's jes' ha'f de reason," she replied; and presently went on with the next chapter of her story.

"De nex' young lady in de fam'ly was Miss Cic'ly — her what missy is named fer. She was de gran'daughter er de Houston who built de house, an' my ole marster's sister, an' dat mek her marster's aunt. My mammy used to say she was de beautifulest Houston ever borned, but my mammy ain never seed missy."

"I am sure not," answered Fairlee fervently.

"No, sir; my mammy died de year missy was borned. Yonder's de udder Miss Cic'ly's picture up over de mantelpiece."

"I have often thought Miss Houston resembled the picture," said Fairlee, looking up at the sweet, dark eyes gazing out of the gilt frame. Speculation on that face had been one of the entertainments of his sick hours.

"Yes, sir; she do look lak her gre't-aunt, only she mo' prettier, 'caise her skin is fairer."

According to mammy this Cicely was very popular and many fine gentlemen came riding from Savannah and Charleston and Mobile to court her. But she was hard to please, and sent them one by one

away. The first year of the Mexican war a young captain, returning from the front to be nursed of his wounds, had fainted in the stage as it passed the Pinehurst gate, and the master had hospitably taken him in. The rose-room was given up to him, and the beautiful Cicely had become his nurse. For two months she spent her care upon him, giving up all visiting and gayety. From the first mammy's mammy had seen that he was "possessed of love" for her, and gradually she saw, too, the answering flame in the eyes of her young mistress; she was too happy to try to conceal it. When at last he began to go about the house a little, everybody expected he would declare himself and that the wedding would follow. In the girl's eyes was the shy expectancy of love. But he did not speak; something seemed on his mind; he sometimes sat for hours in a moody silence, and once he had been seen leaning on the desk yonder with his face in his hands, shaking with sobs. He would give no explanation of his emotion; and at last one morning when Jake, who waited on him, carried up his hot water, he found the ivied window open and the room empty. On the dresser was a note for Miss Cicely. She had read that note alone in the deserted room, and when she came out "her face was lak de face uf er sperret, so white an' cole"; but she did not show the letter. She took up her visiting and her gayeties as before, and even went

to dance at the new governor's ball. Her suitors came flocking back, but nothing, no tender vows or words of passion melted the frozen look in her eyes. She never told anybody what was in the captain's letter until, catching a fever in Mobile, she came home to die. Then she told her brother that he had written that he loved her, but that they could never marry because he already had a wife in Vera Cruz. He had not loved the Mexican girl, but she had nursed him the first time he was wounded, and been so much in his tent that his honour and gratitude demanded the marriage. He had been a coward, he said, not to have told Cicely this before, but his marriage had become so hateful to him that he could not talk of it. And besides, although he had loved Cicely from the first, he had had no idea she would ever come to care for him, for he had heard how cold she was to her suitors. Only when he saw the answering love in her eyes did his baseness appear to him in its true proportions. The only thing was to go away without speaking, for he had no right to so much as take her hand.

"Ole master writ some letters an' foun' out it was all de truf — an' dey *do say* dat when de cap'un hyeard as how Miss Cic'ly was daid, he shot hissef. But ole marster was clean 'stracted when he done put his pretty sister out in de graveyard by dat udder young lady wid de broken heart. He say

it look lak dar was bad luck in dis room, an' when he come from de fun'el he shet de do' an' set de wa'drobe befo' it; an' nobody ain never stay in here from dat day twell missy had you fotched here. Ev'y spring an' fall Jake'd clean an' air it, an' den gi' de key back ter missy."

The soft drawling voice trailed off into silence, broken faintly by the click of the flying needles. The sun had disappeared behind a cloud and a pale, gray light filled the room. For some time Fairlee lay still, looking at the portrait of the girl whose lover had gone away out of the vine-wreathed window leaving her sentence of doom on the old dresser across the room. He thought he could see her as she stood there, in the cruel blaze of the morning light, reading her bitter fate. Then a curious thought came to him, and he asked tentatively:

"And there is some superstition in the family about this room?"

"Yes, sir; dere's a sayin' dat whatever man stay in here gwine brek de heart er de daughter er de house."

"And yet — they put me here."

"Missy done it; she doan bleeve in no sech talk. Ev'y udder room in de house was full, 'caise we all got so many er de kin stayin' wid us."

"Did no one remember the old saying that night I was brought here?"

"Oh, yes, sir; ole miss an' Miss 'Riar an' me. We all begged her not ter open de do'; but missy's mighty high-headed, 'caise she's been mistis here sence she were er little gal. She say twarn' nuthin' but foolishness, an' she had de wa'drobe moved an' de fire lighted 'fo' you could git er good bref." There was a moment of silence, then a quiet chuckle: "I spec she warn' skeered 'bout her heart, 'caise ef nuthin' happen it look lak she gwine mar'y Mars Ray."

Fairlee waited a moment before speaking. Did he have a right to question her? Would not Cicely justly consider it impertinent? He looked down at the honeysuckle trellis, recalling each detail of the farewell scene enacted there. Milly held the key to the information he wanted, but the question in his thoughts did not come; instead he asked, after a pause, wishing to keep her tongue going on this subject so that possibly she might herself tell what he wanted to know:

"Did Lieutenant Clinch live here in the house with her when they were children?"

"He lived here 'bout two years atter his pa was drown'd."

"How did that happen?"

"Lordy, cap'un, ain you done hyeard 'bout dat? Well, when Mars Ray was nine an' missy was eight, 'caise dere's jes' er yer between 'em, dey pas went ter Mobile er-fishin'; an' somehow marster fell

in de water an' Mars Clinch he jump in atter 'im, an' though he push marster ter de boat, he hissef got ketched in de 'tow, an' when dey got 'im out he was done clean gone. Sho was turrible times. Marster look lak he gwine crazy fer erwhile. It was den he fotch Miss 'Riar an' little Mars Ray here ter we all, an' dey stay 'bout two yers. Den dey moved ter Atlanta — but dey is al'ays come back here fer de summers, an' me an' missy stayed one winter wid Miss 'Riar so's she could go ter school. So you see 'tain been much time she an' Mars Ray been erpart. He been keepin' on sayin' he gwine mar'y her soon's he grown, but you see he went in de army las' spring."

"And — she agrees to marry him?"

The old woman looked up sharply: "Lordy, cap'un, she ain gwine say nuthin' twell he mek de real su'gestion ter her — 'twouldn't be good an' ladylak."

"What do you mean by the real suggestion?"

"Ax her ter name de day."

"I see. But she will name it?"

But she was picking up a dropped stitch and did not answer.

"You think that she cares — that is that she loves him?" He felt that the question was not fair to the girl, that she would rightfully consider him to be prying; but the temptation to learn her heart **was** great. But the old woman foiled him.

“Tain fer me wha am jes’ her black mammy ter say what’s in her heart — even ef I knowed. But I *do* know dis — dat she an’ her pa’d do anything ter mek up ter Mars Ray fer his pa’s drownin’.”

With the last words she rose and putting her knitting aside said it was time for her to go and help look after the supper table because “some niggers was too triflin’ ter cut bread ’cepen in hunks. Did the captain want any medicine before she went?”

“Nothing at all, thank you. And, Mammy Milly, here, buy yourself something with this as a present for the interesting story you told me.”

She looked doubtfully at the silver piece he had taken from the purse under his pillow, saying that since the war came and they did not travel any, she did not know where she would spend it. But she took it finally, adding that it “mought come in handy”; and gathering up the lunch tray and some medicine glasses she went slowly and ponderously away.

CHAPTER X

THE SIEGE GUNS FROM AFAR

And held him at the sabre's point, and dared him pass that way — Anon.

MAMMY'S plodding footsteps ceased to sound in the hall. Outside of the windows of the rose-room the gray light grew grayer as the twilight closed in with a dash of rain; but within, the leaping firelight defied the gloom, and the window curtains and the draperies of the high bed tester glowed rich and warm, making a scene of wonderful comfort and colour.

Fairlee, lying back against his white pillows, looked long at the painted face above the mantel, going over in his mind the story of the girl's love, and filling in from fancy the wide gaps mammy had left in the narrative. So another soldier of another generation and another war had been nursed back to life here in this bed, and had loved the soft hand that ministered to him. How strangely history repeated itself! He could see that other Cicely, darker and taller than the one he knew, coming and going through the door, her vigilant eyes

missing no change in the sufferer. And, keen as a delicious pain, he felt the eagerness with which the wounded man had watched for her. Did he himself not know the yearning of that watch? Step by step he traced the ripening of that old romance; read the sweet, almost imperceptible beginnings of love, felt the false note of the unconfessed marriage, not mentioned at first because of its irksome lovelessness; then put aside out of sheer inability to speak because of that other growing passion. Discreditable the concealment was, and yet the man had meant no disloyalty, had foreseen no danger to the girl, not dreaming that she was secretly reading the same heart-page as he. And the awakening to the realization of her love — what had that been like? Despite its futility, what paradisiacal joy had throbbled through that mad hour? The question, with all its tender possibilities, burned in Fairlee's thoughts, and with an instinctive gesture he put out his hand and drew the rose-red drapery of the tester into view, and gazed long and earnestly at the two bits of gray ribbon pinned to the edge.

"After all his seeming duplicity," he said under his breath, "he was a brave man to go away and claim none of the fruits of a mutual love — not even one touch of her sweet lips — yes, he was a brave man!"

Then something made him look up, and in the

door-way was Cicely, and behind her were Minna and little Dick.

"Are you feeling so neglected that you have to look at those ribbons as a reminder of our compact of mutual succour?" the girl said, smiling as she came forward.

"I am never neglected — your watchfulness does not allow of that for so much as a moment. Mammy Milly has been with me for at least an hour — by your order she said."

"Yes; I was afraid you might need something, and we have all been so absorbed by — other things."

"Yes, he answered, looking at her very directly. "I quite understand your absorption. It was right of you to put me entirely from your thoughts. I have no claims compared to those of your cousin and his cause." She met his eyes for a moment, then turned to the fire.

"Captain Fairlee," asked Minna, her shoulder against the foot-post of the bed, her bright, impertinent face tilted upward, "do you believe General Sherman will capture Savannah?"

"As far as we can believe anything that has not yet happened, Miss Minna, I believe he will."

"Well, he has burned Atlanta and Macon, and now if he captures and destroys Savannah, where on earth am I to get a pattern of white silk or Paris muslin for a—a——" She stopped, reddening and laughing.

"For a bridal dress?" he smiled. "If you put off the wedding until spring, Savannah will be open again; for by that time the war will probably be over."

"And by that time she will have changed her mind half a dozen times. Joe Howell looked very handsome to-day, but Ed Miles and Frank Tait are still alive, and her fancy will veer the first time one of them appears on the scene, and makes love to her," teased Cicely, as she stirred the wood fire to a brighter blaze.

"Really, Cicely, I don't see how you happen to know how anybody looked — you were so absolutely taken up with Ray," retaliated the other girl.

Cicely put the tongs down before she answered: "It is just possible that I have a wider range of vision than you, and see more than one thing at a time."

"When a girl talks to just one man three quarters of an hour when there are at least twenty others present, it looks very much like a case of complete absorption to me," laughed Minna. "How does it strike you, Captain Fairlee?"

"I would not presume to have an opinion on the subject," he answered, wishing Cicely would turn her head.

"You are perfectly beautifully polite, captain. If you were not one of Sherman's bummers I'd waste a few smiles on you myself," said Minna, moving toward the door.

"You almost make me regret my uniform," he answered in the same gay tone, as she waved her hand and disappeared.

"Dick," said Fairlee, knowing the desire of the boy's heart, "do you not want to look at my sword? Get it out of the closet." And the child sprang eagerly to avail himself of the permission.

"Oh, it is beautiful! Ray let me put on his to-day, and it clanked *so* loud. I wish I were big enough to have one and go to the war!" and he sank down on the rug, tracing the scroll work on the hilt.

"Am I to have any more of that bad tasting tonic?" Fairlee asked of the girl, hoping to draw her closer for a few words.

"Of course. It is past the time — how careless of me to forget after coming all the way up the stairs just to see that you had it." She came instantly to the little table at the head of the bed and poured out the dose. "I know it is awfully bitter," she said, handing it to him.

For just a fleeting moment he touched her fingers on the glass: "Nothing you gave me in kindness could be bitter — you have been so good to me to-day, so loyal and kind; I realize what you saved me from — perhaps the fate of those poor fellows tied to their horses."

"Oh, no; they would only have carried you away to prison. Those others were taken red-handed

in acts of lawlessness; but you — oh, they would not have shot you!”

“Perhaps not; but it is possible that, in my weak and wounded condition, the shooting would have been more merciful than the prison. At any rate you saved me and I am grateful; you must feel that I am. But there is something else I wish to ask just now — am I forgiven for what I said this morning?”

He saw the delicate colour that crept into her face, but her tone was studiously an effort at memory. “Did you say anything that needed forgiveness — anything out of the way? I believe I have forgotten.”

“I said nothing of which I am ashamed, and I regret it only because of its presumption and because it may have annoyed you. I said I loved you.”

She turned back toward the medicine stand: “We say many foolish things when we — are not well.”

“But that was not a foolish thing, except in its uselessness. Instead, it is the most beautiful thing that ever came into my life.”

Carefully she arranged the vials and glasses as though their systematic placing were a matter of life and death: “Mammy must brew you another fever tea that you may have no more delirious fancies.”

“Cicely!”

"Hush! you must not call me that; it is not permitted except to my ——"

"I've come back," laughed Minna from the door, "to begin to waste those smiles on you. Goodness, but Cicely must have given you a bad dose of medicine, you look so cut up!"

"The bare fact that Miss Houston condescends to give me my medicine at all takes away the bad taste," he answered.

"That sounds like my smiles *would* be wasted," laughed Minna, with meaning emphasis, as she put into the mantel vase the chrysanthemums she had brought.

"You yourself said a while ago that Captain Fairlee was perfectly beautifully polite," put in Cicely, with what seemed undue haste.

"Well, his politeness is not stretching to the point of looking glad to see me, so I'll just curl up here on the rug by Dick and listen to him make love to this sword, for that is what he is doing, even if it has fought against the South. How many rebels did you ever kill with this blade, Captain Fairlee?"

"Oh, it would not require arithmetical progression to calculate the number."

"I expect I could eat every one you ever slew," she teased.

"That depends on your appetite."

"Oh, for dead soldiers it would not be very voracious! I prefer them alive. Cicely, you must

have been feeding the invalid on needle soup he is so sharp." And then she began to recount for him some of the incidents of the scouting party's visit.

And he listened closely enough to exclaim in monosyllables now and then, but his eyes were on Cicely, who had seated herself in the high carved chair at the end of the rug. Her shapely head, bound about with its dark braids, rested against the rose-hued damask, and the glow of the firelight, concentrating upon her, made her as a figure out of some exquisitely illustrated book from a master hand. He knew that nothing would ever make him forget that picture. How deliciously girlish, how sweetly womanly it all was — the loosely clasped hands on the dark dress, the lifted chin, giving just a hint of the white throat, the oval face, the downward sweep of the long lashes, the red of the mouth that seemed always in revolt against the gravity of the eyes! Every look he gave her was to his pulses as a draught of warming wine, filling him with a madness of longing to touch her, to hold her to his heart; for the events of that day had been as a precipitate to show him that what was in his thoughts of her was no invalid's dream, no sick-bed fancy. He loved her; he knew it positively, absolutely — and he had dared to tell her!

The tinkle of the supper bell from the hall below broke the scene, and the girls stood up.

"Dick will stay with you until Jake brings your

tea," Cicely said, "and Lena bade me tell you she would come and read to your later, if you wished it."

"It will be very kind of her, but — you will come with her?"

"Not to-night. Jake and I have to go over plantation accounts. I hope you will sleep well. Lena will drop your last dose of medicine."

At the door Minna turned "to waste" a last smile on him, but Cicely did not look back. At the head of the stair he heard the former's light laugh.

"What eloquent eyes Captain Fairlee has, Cicely, and what charming manners. If he should try to make love to me, Yankee as he is, I think I should listen."

"If you did not, it would be the first time you ever turned a deaf ear to such words," replied Cicely's voice. "Certainly all is love-grist that goes to your mill."

"Well, Grandma Houston has always taught us that to be a good listener is a rare accomplishment. And, besides, I have a fancy to see if men have any originality in the matter of love making. So far, I must confess, I have found them sadly alike; but I fancy the Yankee captain might be different."

Then with a gurgle of laughter and a soft patter of slippers feet, the two ran down the stair.

The next day Fairlee was allowed to sit up for a while; and each day afterward he felt his strength

returning. Twice he went as far as the hall door for exercise; once he ventured to the head of the stair.

"I shall not trouble you much longer," he said to Cicely at the end of the week, as she and mammy sat with him a while in the twilight of the December day. "Your mission of mercy will soon be done."

"And what is your purpose when you are able to leave us?"

"To report for duty — there is nothing else a soldier could do."

She looked at him sharply, unwaveringly: "You go from my house, from my nursing, to fight my people!"

He was taken aback. "It is not like your generosity, Miss Houston, to put it that way. You knew — you must have known that if I recovered from this wound I must fight again."

"I believe I never thought of it at all."

"But ask yourself if, as a sworn soldier, an officer, I could do otherwise. Surely you must see it that way."

There was a long pause. At last she spoke slowly, ignoring his question: "And you will fight against my father, against my brother, against my ——"

"Against your lover?" He leaned forward, speaking so softly that mammy's old ears did not catch the words. "Except that I am bound to you by such ties of gratitude that any pain I gave

you would be a sin, the latter would be a veritable joy — to fight any man for your favour, to fight any man for *you!*”

For answer she got up and, turning her back on him as he sat before the fire, crossed to the window, by whose fading light mammy was plying her knitting needles.

“I beg your pardon,” he said humbly; “I am always forgetting myself, always failing to remember that as one of Sherman’s despised soldiers and a pensioner upon your pity my rights as a man have been compromised — for every man should have the right to speak the things of his heart.”

The white flash of anger was dying in Cicely’s breast. She was asking herself if Ray had been wounded and nursed by a Northern girl, would he not have returned to fight for his flag even if his nurse’s people had been his opponents? And she knew she would have despised him if he had shirked. And would not this soldier of the other side be shirking if he failed to go again to his post of duty? True, she had never thought of him as fighting again, never dreamed he would be well enough before the end of the war; but it was not his fault that his splendid constitution and her good care of him had won the physical victory before the martial crisis.

Slowly she tied and retied the knot in mammy’s red and yellow turban, spreading out the ends of

the bandanna in wide butterfly wings. Then like a flash Ray's words came to her, and she faced toward Fairlee.

"But you cannot go; you are my prisoner and I am responsible to General Wheeler for you; Ray said so when he left you — that was his condition."

For a moment he was staggered by this view of the situation. He had taken the words of Lieutenant Clinch as a pretty speech to the girl, but if she had accepted them as a trust, it would make a difference. After a pause he asked, "And how long do you expect to retain me in your keeping?"

"Ray said two weeks would probably be long enough to prevent you from helping Sherman in any mischief."

"One of those weeks is gone."

"Yes, but the other is yet to come, and I shall detain you at least that long."

"But there is yet another side to the matter. Have you considered that you could not hold me against the will of another reconnoitring party?"

"No, for Ray gave me the authority —"

"The first squad of Confederate scouts that comes this way will snap their fingers at your authority and carry me off to be shot or imprisoned. They would really have no alternative, finding me able to be up. A badly wounded man they might leave with you, even as your cousin did, but not a well one — one who might possibly turn informant for

his general. Not even Lieutenant Clinch could so far humour your request as to do that."

She had ceased to spread out the red and yellow butterfly wings on mammy's head, and was looking at him with wide, startled eyes. This was, indeed, a phase of the question that had not occurred to her.

"But still," he continued, "Lieutenant Clinch tacitly took your word for my safe keeping, and if you lay your commands upon me, I will remain, taking my chances even to be executed as a spy within the enemy's ranks rather than that your bond to your cousin should be forfeited. You have only to speak to be obeyed."

Again she untied the turban, and again knotted the ends into those flaunting triangular pinions; but she did not speak. Was he in earnest, or was this but a high-flown appeal to her sympathy? The sight of his blue coat hurt her confidence in him, so thoroughly did it make him of the enemy.

"I listened to you make the bond, so it is also mine — really more mine than yours, since I am a soldier and knew the rules and chances of war better than you. So you see your wish in the matter shall be my law."

When she lifted her head there was a light in her eyes he had never seen there before, a fierce little flame of fight: "I shall lay no commands upon you, for no one of my blood ever saved an enemy

from one death to give him deliberately to another; but, Captain Fairlee, I regard you as my prisoner."

An enemy — saved an enemy! Did she, then, so look upon him after all these weeks of intimate nursing, he who owed his life to her, he who, in this time, had given her the reverence of respect, the devotion of his man's heart?

"You will change that word, Cic — Miss Houston; I cannot bear it from you," he pleaded, and the hard lines in her face slowly relaxed. "You will not speak of me as your enemy!"

But before she could answer the outer silence and all the twilight quiet of the house were rudely broken by a distant explosion that dominated lesser sounds and set the windows in a faint quiver. Mammy dropped her needles with a cry of fear, and Cicely turned her startled eyes to Fairlee. Down stairs a door flew open, and voices were crying:

"What is it?"

"Was it thunder or an earthquake?"

"It can't be thunder, this time of the year."

Boom, it came again; boom, boom! far away, but clearly distinguishable from the other night sounds; for the south wind was strong, and at each repetition the sashes rattled.

Boom!

Cicely tore open the window.

"Is it a storm?" asked Fairlee eagerly.

She leaned out, listening: "No, there is no storm, only a drizzling mist."

"What is it, then?"

Again she listened, her bosom heaving. "It is the report of cannon," she cried; "yes, of cannon. Don't you recognize it?"

"Cannon?"

"Yes; there it is again." She spread her young arms to the night. "It is the distant roar of cannon — somewhere out yonder they are fighting, fighting a great battle for my country. God help the gray, God help the gray!"

Fairlee staggered to his feet, his eyes blazing with excitement: "Yes, yes; it is the guns, and from the south, too. It is Sherman at last — Sherman shelling Savannah. Hark!"

Boom — boom.

"You are right, you must be right, for Savannah lies just there under the sound. The struggle for the city has begun. Oh, mammy, pray, pray, for our dear ones close to those murderous guns!"

"The battle at last — ah, the glory of it — the thrill of the fight, the music of the muskets!" cried Fairlee, standing erect, forgetful of wound and weakness.

"My father is there with Hardee, my dear father — God keep him — God save him!" quavered the girl, her white face lifted toward the clouded sky; and the old woman, taking up the prayer,

raised her voice in a tremulous appeal for her master and "de boys."

Down stairs a door banged, for the rest of the household had rushed out on the porches to determine the nature and direction of the reverberations.

"There it is again," cried Fairlee, pressing to the window beside Cicely, as the distant mutterings began once more. "Ah, Sherman knows how to fight!"

"Perhaps they are General Hardee's guns — perhaps *we* are shelling you!" answered Cicely, turning upon him, fiercely jealous for her countrymen.

"No, no; the investment of Savannah has begun — those are the Federals' heavy siege guns making the assault. Hardee would wait to defend himself — and he cannot do that long against such an army as ours — picked fighters all of them and in splendid condition. I tell you, Cicely, those are Sherman's cannon, and we are capturing Savannah."

And in her heart the girl felt it was true. Since the burning of Atlanta she had had no hope for Savannah, in spite of Ray's reassurance and her father's hopeful messages — and now the end was come. But to acknowledge it seemed cowardly, disloyal; so she kept crying out that he did not know, he was only guessing.

"Guessing at a certainty, knowing Sherman's strength and Hardee's weakness; and the Federal gunboats are in the river below the city to help. Ah, if I could only hear the bugles — see the old flag fly above the ranks of blue! It is going on to victory now, I know it, I feel it!"

She leaned out of the window into which the rain was beginning to beat, and waved her arms: "The stars-and-bars — God save the stars-and-bars!" she cried fiercely, as if actually cheering on a charge.

Boom, boom.

His hand closed sharply over hers on the wet sill: "Listen, Cicely, listen — it is the message of fate to Savannah; it is the death knell of your Confederacy! We have triumphed, and you have lost."

"I will not believe it! The South — God save my country!" she broke into sobs, sinking to her knees. But still his fingers held hers, while again the window above them quivered with the far-off detonation of the guns.

"They are fighting — fighting gloriously! And my company is there, my comrades are carrying the flag to victory and winning glory and laurels, while I, I stand here afar off and hear but the roar of the battle! — I cannot stand it — I tell you I cannot; I must go. They have only begun and there may yet be time for me to share in the fight ——"

"Go — *you?*" The words caught in her throat so they were only a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, yes; I will go now — this minute."

Buoyed by excitement and forgetful of all physical weakness, he sprang to the head of the bed, behind the drapery of which his pistol belt was hanging, and with trembling fingers began to buckle it on. Cicely turned her head, and for one intense, silent, amazed moment watched him from where she knelt. Then, swift and stealthy as an unleashed lioness, she was across the room, snatching from the table, as she passed it, the unsheathed sword that Dick had left there from his evening's visit. And when the pistol belt was buckled and Fairlee, beginning to reel a little from the reaction of the excitement, wheeled toward the door for his exit, he was stopped abruptly, for the way was barred by a figure at fencing poise. The point of the drawn sword touched his breast sharply, and the girl — all the fighting blood of a long line of martial ancestors pulsing in the ascendant — cried sternly:

"Stand back, Captain Fairlee — you are my prisoner!"

CHAPTER XI

ON THE ROOF AT PINEHURST

For war is hell — W. T. Sherman

FAIRLEE, out of whose limbs the momentary strength was failing, put up his hand in astonished protest; but Cicely's face was inexorable, and the muscles in her wrist were like steel as she held him from the door. Harder the naked sword point pressed against his breast.

"Stand back, I say. You cannot pass here."

But mammy, who had lighted the candles behind his back, saw what the girl did not — the drooping of the shoulders, the quivering of the whole body, the helpless bending of the knees; and running forward she caught the swaying figure and broke its fall to the floor.

"Lordy, honey, he warn't strong ernuf fer all dis foolin'."

The sword clattered to the floor, and Cicely knelt by the fainting man: "Put him down flat, mammy, and give me the brandy. And don't tell anybody how it happened."

When Fairlee opened his eyes a few minutes later

Grandma Houston was standing at the foot of the bed, and Jake was wrapping a warm blanket about his feet.

"He is all right now," said Cicely's voice from somewhere near the head of the bed. "The brandy has done its work. He was not strong enough to sit up so long."

"Decidedly not," said Grandma Houston severely. "I am quite surprised that you and mammy allowed it. Hereafter I shall not leave him so much to your care. Old heads are wisest in a sick room. You said he fell? It is providential he did not rupture his wound. Put that hot blanket back to his feet, Jake. And, Cicely, a little more brandy."

"He has had enough, grandma."

"My dear, I measured brandy before you were born."

For the next two days the invalid lay in bed, and Grandma Houston sat magisterially in the high-backed chair and directed matters in the sick room. Cicely came only at rare intervals, and then remained but a few moments, standing usually by the fire or the window, so that so much as one private word with her was impossible. But something of the hard glitter he had seen in her eyes as she held that naked blade to his breast seemed to linger in her glance, and he felt himself unforgiven, and in verity her "prisoner."

The cannonading to the southeast was not re-

newed, and a keen expectancy and anxiety pervaded the little company of women and children assembled under the Pinehurst roof. Everybody there had some near and dear one with Hardee or with Wheeler, and the strain on nerves was hard to bear. But no courier came from the South.

"Men certainly have the easier part in times of war," sighed Cicely, watching the big road for some one who might bring them news.

"The easier part?" exclaimed Minna.

"Yes, for it is easier to fight than to eat your heart out with longing and impatience."

"Oh, Ray is all right," teased Minna; and Cicely turned away, and no one saw her watching the road again during those trying times; but each night she stood at her window looking up at the big winter stars, and whispered: "Keep him, God, keep him safe for me!"

Those two days of Grandma Houston's rule over the invalid, the girl gave to household and plantation matters. It was no easy thing to feed such a family as that under her roof, now that the raiders and foragers had carried off so much of the produce and provisions laid away for the winter, and she and Jake had many a troubled conversation as to ways and means. They must save the seed for the next planting — potatoes, corn, and beans. She, Minna, and Lena had helped the old man bury the potatoes under the floor of the hen house, working while

mammy kept the other servants busy indoors that they might not be tempted to betray the place to foragers.

And on the second day while grandma and tardily returning strength kept Fairlee a sure captive, Cicely took the two girls and Dick and went to hide the seed-grain. Half a mile from the house and in the forest was a tall sycamore where the owls built every year in a hollow under a big limb. This hollow extended far down the heart of the tree and made a safe receptacle for their store of seed. The grain they had tied up in small sacks which they carried to the forest hidden in the folds of their skirts. Dick was pushed up the tree and after carefully removing the last-year's nest, he dropped the bags one by one through the crevice to the great hollow below. There it was perfectly safe from the effects of weather, and in danger only from the four-footed banditti of the woods.

"We'll get it out with grab-hooks in the spring, or else cut the tree down," said Cicely, who had climbed up to help Dick. But after restoring the nest so as to close the crevice, Dick, by Jake's directions, left in it a piece of "fox fire" whose lambent light looked, in the dark, like the great dull eye of some animal watching for its prey and ready to pounce upon whatever came within reach.

"Dat'll fix 'em fer er time," the old man had said. "Shine jes' lak er snake eye up dar in de dark, an'

you bet Mistah Squir'l ain' gwine be so handy wid his stealin'."

As the four came home singing through the sunset, Minna looked up at the big, rambling house.

"How hard it is to pick out the windows of the rose-room among all that array of glass and sash and cornice," she said.

"Yes, the room is so unobtrusive that it does not stare," answered Cicely. "It is said the architects built it that way purposely — a sort of secret chamber."

"And it has such a doleful history! I don't see how you ever made up your mind to open it; but I suppose you are not afraid this Yankee will keep up the legend and break your heart?"

"Hardly," laughed Cicely. "Great-grand-aunt Floy and Great-aunt Cicely suffered; but the superstition as to the room always amused me. How could the simple fact of a man's sleeping there make it possible for him to break any woman's heart?"

"Of course you feel safe enough to laugh since nobody but Ray can break your heart — and he is not likely to try it, he is so crazy over you. I think I never saw him as handsome as he was the other day. That soldier cap suited him to a dot."

"I think all the soldiers look beautiful to us women because we are so glad to see them alive," replied Cicely earnestly.

"There is something in that; but Ray was particularly good looking. Lena must have thought so, too, from the number of pictures she made of him and his cap."

For a moment Lena, feeling their eyes upon her, was very pale, then the colour came in a rush, staining cheek and brow. "I was only trying — what I could do at — at portraits," she said nervously, looking anywhere but at Cicely.

"It is well you put it in the plural, for I think there must have been a dozen of them — Ray with his cap on straight; Ray with his cap on one side; Ray with his cap pulled over his eyes; Ray with his cap pushed back; Ray with his cap in his hand as he bent to tell Cicely good-bye. For the life of me I don't see how you managed to take in his changes of pose, with Phil Davis talking to you all the while."

Minna's tongue had run on glibly, but at Cicely's heart there was a queer throb. Why should Lena make pictures of Ray; and why should she blush so about it? What mystery was here; what hidden, sorrowful romance of which she had never dreamed? Did Lena love Ray — love him like *that*?

Lena was two years her junior, but she remembered how the child always followed them in their play, and did Ray's bidding obediently. While she herself had calmly appropriated his reddest apples and ripest nuts, Lena had let him scrape the

jam from her bread or take the "biggest bite" from her slice of cake. Gladly had she hunted his ball or picked up his marbles to be allowed to tag behind him at his games. But that had all been years ago. Ray had long since given over his big-boy tyranny, though in his manner to the girl there was always a something that was not condescension nor yet fatherliness, but which partook of both. He simply never seemed to see that her hair was tucked up and her skirts were long; she was still little Lena in his mind.

Cicely's thoughts flashed over these things in one comprehending moment while she watched the colour flame and fade in the girl's face. Then suddenly she slipped her arm around her, saying:

"Lena is very talented. She ought to study abroad; Captain Fairlee said so the other day when he was looking over her portfolio."

Lena's face changed: "Did he say that? He knows so much about art. Oh, it would be beautiful to live among artists and work with them! But I never thought of it for myself, for mother was always so delicate, and now the house is gone."

And in that sentence was summed up the motif of the girl's life — others first, herself last. But Cicely had diverted the talk from Ray before teasing Minna, had divined the revelation laid bare to her own eyes, and now she fell silent, following the train of thought that wound about her lover in

this new light of another's unasked and unasking devotion. She was not jealous, Ray's open worship of herself made that absurd; but that the other girl should be her favourite cousin, the woman who, above all the world, she would have grieved to wound, was a cruel stab. Then she thrust the thought sharply from her, refusing to credit her suspicion; but as they walked she held Lena very close about the waist and only Minna and Dick finished the song they had begun. It was rather a sober group that the watcher from the high window saw coming down the avenue under the green pines. That night Cicely sat long at her desk, and the last words she wrote were: "Oh, Ray, so many of us love you and are praying for your return."

The next day even Grandma Houston had to admit that Fairlee was better, and he was allowed to leave his bed again and even to walk in the hall for exercise. Lena came and read aloud to him and Minna brought her guitar and sang snatches of songs for his entertainment, and Marie's whole family of dolls was spread at his feet. But it was the afternoon of the next day before he got a word with Cicely. She had studiously avoided his room, but toward sunset of that second day she passed his open door, and he made bold to call her. She stopped in the door. Dick was leaning on the arm of Fairlee's chair, talking eagerly.

"Miss Houston, Dick tells me you are going

with him up to the roof; may I not come too? I — promise not to jump off.”

“You are too weak to make the climb, for the steps are steep.”

“Dick says he will push or pull me, just as I prefer. Let me come; the exercise will be good for me.”

She hesitated, and like others who have done that, she was lost; for Dick, taking her silence for assent, ran, shouting for Fairlee’s cap and heavy coat, and in a moment had him ready.

“You just go ahead, Cic, I’ll bring the cap’un,” he said pompously, offering his shoulder for the invalid’s support.

The steps were quite as steep as she had said, and just at the top, Fairlee, exhausted from the climb, might have fallen had she not taken him sharply by the arm.

“If you faint again Grandma Houston will never forgive me.”

But he was not going to faint, it was only his knees that were unsteady; and when they passed through the trap-door and stood on the broad, flat roof, his breath came back. A low balustrade framed the flat surface from the slope of the roof; and close to this was a bench to which Cicely led him.

“Don’t try to talk until you get your breath back,” she said, and followed Dick to the railing

where the two stood in eager conversation as the child picked out with his index-finger familiar places on the plantation. Always a visit to the roof was a delight to him.

"We never let him come alone," said Cicely, re-joining Fairlee and seating herself at the other end of the bench. "He is so venturesome he might climb out on the slope."

"How far you can see over the surrounding country, and how fine the view is; I had no idea the house stood so high."

"The ascent is very gradual, and the country beyond quite level."

"I suppose that is the railroad," he said, indicating a line across the flat fields.

"It *was* the railroad; but your general tore it up. For miles the rails are twisted about the telegraph poles to render them utterly useless. That was Sherman's method of devastation."

"With what dislike you always mention his name."

"And have I not just cause? Has not every woman in Georgia reason to more than dislike him?"

"But are you quite just? This is war."

"Upon what?" she broke in quickly. "This march of his was war upon women and children, a war of pillage and plunder, not a war of shot and shell, such as true soldiers should fight. Sherman

left Atlanta a month ago, and not one blow, except at a few skirmishers, has he struck."

"Has he had a foe to fight?"

"That is just it. He knew when he started on this raiding march that not one of the Southern commanders had anything like enough men to oppose him. Even Wheeler and Hardee combined would have been but a momentary interruption in his path. There were only women and children ahead of him — nobody to fight. He knew it, and you know he knew it."

"That was his good fortune; a general must seize the advantages that come to him."

"It can never be to a general's advantage to drive helpless women and children out of their homes as he did in Atlanta, and then to expose the families of soldiers to the brutalities we women of Georgia have suffered at the hands of his marauding foragers in this march to the sea."

"I think there has been some exaggeration as to the conduct of the foragers."

"Do you? Well, stand up a moment and let me show you confirmation of part of these reports. Do you see that heap of rubbish yonder to the right — on the railroad line? Well, that was our railroad station; the exit we had to get our crops to market and earn our living. Then look almost directly in front of you; those chimneys silhouetted against the evening sky are all of home that Lena

will have to return to when the war is done. You know the horror of that fire, for your men burnt it. Oh, I know they had given you the slip and did the mischief without your permission; but they *did* it. Now, turn there toward the west; in that clump of trees is a great pile of broken brick that was once the Howell house. That, too, has fed the trail of smoking homes Sherman has left in his wake. This house would have gone, the torch had been already applied, but your respect for a Masonic apron saved it."

"Not that alone, I would not have burned your house or allowed it to be burned under any conditions. When I went in charge of a band of foragers they respected the women and the homes, until that last day when there were so many unruly spirits among them."

"Well, you saved our house, no matter for what cause; and we owe you endless thanks. But that one act of soldierly generosity cannot offset all the other cruelties to our helpless neighbours. Did you say we exaggerated the deeds of Sherman's bummers? From this one roof we see the ruins of three others; and this is a fair sample of the country from here back to Atlanta. Why, Kilpatrick boasts that he has left only chimneys behind him — actually boasts it!"

Her red mouth was quivering and her eyes were filling with angry tears. Always the thought of the

devastation of her beloved state stirred her. He tried to smile away her bitter humour.

"I see we cannot reconcile our war policies," he said lightly.

"Heaven hold back the day on which we adopt your marauding tactics!" Then seeing the blood mount to his cheeks, she added quickly: "Why will you urge me on — why will you make me say such rude things — even if they are true? Can't you see I want to be civil to you under my own roof?"

"A jailer does not have to be particularly courteous to a prisoner," he said, leaning toward her.

For a moment they held each other's gaze in silence, each recalling every detail of that scene of two nights before and of which the last word was a reminder. And he saw again in her eyes that little flame of fight that had proclaimed him her enemy.

"Will you tell me," she said at last, "how you expected to leave here and make your way to the Federal army at Savannah — even if I had been willing to let you pass?"

"I had no plan in mind; I only wanted to be in the fight, that was the one thing perfectly clear in my thoughts. You do not know how a trained soldier longs for the battle his comrades are fighting — it is a veritable thirst of the soul!"

"And that thirst was on you?"

The eloquence of his glance answered her; but presently he added: "Suppose Lieutenant Clinch

had been here, and had heard the call of his general's guns?"

Her eyes were luminous for a moment. Was it for her cousin or for her cause? He hardly needed to ask himself. "He would not have closed his ears to the sound," she laughed triumphantly.

"Well, Miss Houston, we are both of us soldiers."

She was answered, and for a few minutes they sat silently gazing at the panorama spread out before them — the beautiful Georgia country desolated not by winter, but by war. Down one slope of the eminence on which the house stood stretched the rifled corn fields where Sherman had filled his wagons for the end of the long march; and whitening the other incline was the unharvested cotton going to waste with wind and rain, while the master rode after the stars-and-bars, and the slave who had planted it took his first draught of freedom's wine and saw the future as in a magician's glass. Some thought like this was in Cicely's mind as she watched the scene change under the evening light, the daffodil radiance of the sunset beginning slowly to darken with purple shadows. She scarcely noticed that Dick, attracted by something below, went noisily down the stair. Her reverie was broken by a touch on her hand. Fairlee was leaning toward her.

"There is something I would like to ask you; may I?"

"Certainly."

"If I had been able to resist you, if that miserable faintness had not come to me just when it did, would you have — I mean how far would you have sent that sword?"

Her eyes narrowed a moment: "I believe you said just now that in your soul at that moment was a thirst for fight; well, in mine I think there was a thirst to do my duty, and my duty was to hold you captive."

"Well, you held me — and I bear the wound."

"The wound?"

"Yes. Did you not know that the sword point cut my clothing and entered my breast here near the heart?"

For the space of a breath everything swam away from her in a wavering mist: "The sword point — over your heart?"

"Yes; mammy will tell you the mark is here." He touched himself on the breast. "And every hour since I have asked myself the question: If I had been able to offer any further resistance, would you have found it in your heart to — kill me?"

"To kill you — *kill* you!" She arose abruptly and stood by the balustrade with her back to him. A suffocating hand seemed to grip her throat. Had she, indeed, in the excess of her passion, been near to murder? A cold sweat gathered on her brow.

"Did I frighten you?" his voice asked close to her ear. "I am sorry; I thought of course Mammy Milly had told you the sword left its mark on me. It is nothing to worry over, nothing at all."

"She had not told me." But she did not look at him.

"Then I am sorry I did. But tell me, Cicely — Miss Houston — what you were thinking as you faced me in that dauntless way? What was in your mind of me personally?"

"I think," she answered slowly, "that you were only one of Sherman's bummers who was to be held in custody."

"An enemy simply. Will you always think of me as that? Will you never separate the man from the soldier?"

"They are inseparable."

"For my general and my comrades in camp, yes; but not for you. The soldier in me sinks out of sight in your presence, and it is the man — the heart of the man that speaks to you. Will you listen to it?"

She drew back sharply: "You can have nothing to say to me that I would care to hear. It is getting late; we had better go down."

"You have small stock of mercy! But before we go answer me at least one question: Is it because of my uniform that you will not listen, or because — of Lieutenant Clinch?"

She turned her face toward him, and her dark, unsmiling eyes looked straight into his; in them there was something he could not fathom: "Because of both."

He lifted his cap, then drew it low over his eyes, hiding the hurt there: "Thank you for answering. Shall we go below now?"

But Cicely did not answer. She had turned back to the balustrade, and now something far away on the road beyond the pillaged corn fields caught her eye. Yes, they were cavalymen, a dozen of them, riding with free rein straight toward the house.

"Can you make out their uniforms?" she cried to Fairlee, whose glance had followed hers, and who was leaning far over the railing.

"No; it is too dark. I can only see they are soldiers."

She bent over the rail beside him, straining her eyes through the faint sunset glow. At her heart clutched a cold dread. If they were Federals there would be more robbery, more insults, perhaps another burned home. If they were Confederates, then the man at her side —

"Come!" she cried, with a catch in her throat and a sudden whitening of her lips, "let us go down immediately."

He put his hand over hers for a quick moment. "You have nothing to fear. If they wear my uni-

form they will respect my wishes and commands. If they wear yours —— ”

But she was already on the steep stair. “Give me your hand; it is dark and I know the way,” she said, and in her voice was a tone an officer uses when he commands obedience.

CHAPTER XII

THE SEARCH FOR THE YANKEE CAPTAIN

Thou hast done a deed of daring
Had been perilled but by few — Aytoun

AT THE end of the twisting, shadowy stairway that led from the roof, Cicely let the panting invalid pause for a breathing space. On the main stair below they heard Minna calling to Lena that there were soldiers at the gate. Fairlee had not let go Cicely's hand, and his fingers now closed over it tightly.

"This may be our farewell, for if those men are Confederate scouts they will want me; there are a hundred things I want to say, but this above all ——"

"Come — quick, quick," she interrupted, drawing him down the hall to his own room, where she pushed open the door and glanced in. "Thank heaven, mammy has drawn the curtains! Go in, and on no account open the door unless you hear my voice. I will come back as soon as I can."

"But, Cicely ——"

"And do not put up your curtains or light the candles. Let go my hand now, I must go."

"Not until you promise me one thing — that you will run no risk on my account, that you will not expose yourself for one moment."

But she wrung her hand from his grasp and pushed him across the threshold: "You will help me best by remaining quiet there," she said, and ran away down the hall.

The whole family, startled by Minna's call, had assembled on the porch, eager for the war news the soldiers were sure to bring. At last they were to know the cause of that twilight cannonading.

"They are Confederates, they are our soldiers," Minna was crying joyously, and pirouetting across the porch. Then everybody turned as Cicely sprang through the door and stood in their midst.

"Listen to me before those men come," she cried. "Not one word to them of Captain Fairlee — do you understand? They must not know he is here — this is my house, and you are my guests, and I demand your assistance, depend on your silence. We owe this house to him, and the person who betrays his presence loses — my friendship." Not even Grandma Houston's voice ever had in it a clearer ring of authority, and none who heard her doubted her sincerity. But before any one could answer she had run back into the hall. "Jake, repeat my orders to the servants, make them understand distinctly, then go up stairs and wait for me beside Captain Fairlee's door."

And with her head up and her eyes hard and bright with a dauntless resolve she stepped out between the high white columns and took her place at Grandma Houston's side to receive the men whose sabres were already clanking on the gravel walk. In another minute the man up stairs, listening with his door ajar, heard the treble of the women's voices in eager greeting and question, and the deeper tones of the men in reply, and then the jingle of spurs and the grating of heels as the whole company moved back into the hall.

"Jake," he whispered to the old negro who was leaning over the stair rail, "how many are there?"

"'Bout er dozen — an' dey's tellin' ole miss dat Fo't McAllister down ter S'vannah done falled, but Gen'ul Hardee still in de city; an' sumpen 'bout er 'oman de Yankees done beat up fer some money."

"Then there would be time," Fairlee muttered to himself, glancing speculatively at the white-headed negro a few yards away, but not carrying out his intention of calling him, for there was a great outcry from below, and a man's excited voice cried loudly:

"That is the way these bummers who have slipped their camp are behaving, Mrs. Houston, and General Wheeler has sworn to exterminate every straggler he finds loitering behind Sherman's army to insult and harass our women. Once before a scout-

ing party under Lieutenant Clinch was sent back to gather in the miscreants, but it seems some of them must have escaped his vigilant eye. But we mean to see that none of them escapes us."

"And what will you do with those you catch?" asked Cicely.

"String them up to the first tree big enough to bear their weight."

"Without trial or explanation?"

"Without trial or explanation, Miss Houston. Sherman himself would shoot them for deserters."

"But there may be innocent ones among them."

The officer laughed: "There are no such things as innocent bummers, my dear young lady. Even those who have been nursed in Southern homes turn viper when a chance comes to sting. You heard the story I just told your grandmother?"

And an atrocious story it was. A woman whose husband was in the army and who lived alone with her aged mother and little son had been appealed to by a wounded man wearing a Confederate coat. Believing him to be one of her own people, she took him in, and nursed him, sharing their scanty food with him. In a few days he was able to leave, but before he did so the woman, who had herself been taken ill, asked him to help the boy hide what little money she had left, so that the dreaded foragers from the enemy's ranks might not leave her penniless. He buried the small treasure and went

away. But in a few hours he returned, this time without the gray coat, and demanded money of the woman, who, for a few minutes, did not recognize him. She told him she had no money left; but he turned to the place where the treasure had been concealed and dug it up before her face, telling her he had taken the gray coat from a dead soldier and worn it as a passport to her sympathy, knowing she would not nurse a wounded Yankee with the care she gave a rebel. And when the old mother upbraided him for his deceit, he struck her; and seizing the young woman would have offered her even greater indignities had not the little boy frightened him with a cry of Wheeler's cavalry. He got away, taking the pitiful hoard with him, and leaving destitution and suffering behind, for the aged mother had not rallied from the cruel blow.

"That is the character of men we are hunting, Miss Houston; and one reason for our coming here was that we were told you had cared for a wounded forager, and we want him before he turns traitor to your hospitality."

Did the floor swell up in a wave at Cicely's feet? With an instinctive effort to steady herself, she put out her hand to the newel post of the stair.

"Your information is partly correct, Major Bailey; we did have a wounded Federal officer here, but — you came too late to take him."

"He is then gone?"



"Beyond your reach." Her daring glance swept the group of white-faced women who were staring at her. If one of them betrayed her by so much as an exclamation!

"He was entirely recovered from his wound?"

"By no means. He was still very weak."

"Then why did he wish to leave? I am sure he could have met only kindness here."

"I think the call of Sherman's guns bombarding Fort McAllister was too strong to be resisted," she answered, remembering Fairlee's words that night.

"It was the night of the bombardment then?"

"Yes, it was that night that he — started."

"Did you see him leave?"

"No."

"Did your grandmother?"

"No."

"He slipped away without so much as thanks for your care of him! just like the rest of the ingrates. Did anybody see him go?"

Again her warning glance swept the little company of women: "No one saw him."

"No one? Then perhaps he did not get very far; if he was really as ill as he made you think, he could not have gone any distance. We have scoured the country to the south, and I feel sure we could not have overlooked him. He must be — near at hand."

She saw the drift of his thoughts, read the doubt

in his mind, and a cold dread caught at her heart. Then she smiled back at him bravely, "One man in the open country is not unlike the proverbial needle in a haystack."

"But he must have ridden, since he was so weak; and a man and a horse are not so easily concealed. He *did* ride away?"

"We missed no horse from the stable."

The old soldier looked at her shrewdly: "My dear Miss Houston, there is something strange here. The man, scarcely up from a sick bed, slips away from the house without the knowledge of any one, and escapes on foot over unknown roads. Indeed, I cannot believe that he has gone at all." (Cicely leaned more heavily against the newel post, and Grandma Houston dropped her cane sharply to the floor.) "No," continued the officer, "I cannot believe it. He has eluded you cleverly, but he is still somewhere about the premises — indeed, he must be, for he simply could not have gotten away."

"Major Bailey," began Grandma Houston, straightening herself with the dignity that never failed to impress beholders; but he hastily interrupted her.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Houston, but I am afraid, like that other kindly woman of whom I told you a moment ago, you have nursed a viper back to life here in the bosom of your family."

Cicely's head went up: "You do not understand,

Major Bailey; Captain Fairlee was not a common bummer; he was an officer, a gentleman. Men like him, even when they wear the uniform of the enemy, do not war on women."

She was very beautiful with that light in her eyes, and the gray-haired major swept his cap to the floor with the gallantry of five and twenty years. "Miss Houston, there are some women on whom even the beasts of the field would not war."

Low she swept her answering courtesy, catching his humour, "And there are some men to whom the graces of speech are a natural heritage, and Major Bailey is surely of that class."

"Dear me, is this a minuet?" giggled Minna, watching the pretty bows. "Won't somebody please be my partner?"

Instantly a handsome sergeant, whose blue Irish eyes had scarcely left her face since his entrance, was clicking his heels before her, his cap in his hand, his hand on his heart.

"For the minuet, or for life," he said.

She bent her saucy head, looking at him from between half-closed lids. "You are very obliging, but the minuet will do; for life would be rather too long a dance."

"With you for a partner, eternity would not be long enough."

"But to get back to business," said Major Bailey, smiling at the little comedy. "As I said, I do not

believe this Captain Fairlee has escaped. He is probably hiding somewhere in the house or the out-houses, waiting a favourable moment to work you a harm. That other scoundrel who has escaped us and come in this direction may possibly join him — and a dangerous couple they would prove. I know your son well, Mrs. Houston, and I simply cannot return without being able to send him word that his household is safe — and safe you are not while men like these Yankee camp-trailers are in your neighbourhood. Therefore I am going to ask your permission to make a thorough search for this mysteriously missing captain.”

“We do not fear any harm from Captain Fairlee; there is really no necessity —— ” began Grandma Houston, bending her fine old head rather haughtily. But Cicely’s laugh broke in:

“Why, every room in the house is occupied, Major Bailey; for you see what a company we are. Under those circumstances it would be absurd to imagine that a grown man could conceal himself here.”

He bowed gravely, “Still, with your permission, I would like to be quite satisfied. I could make my report at camp with a much clearer conscience if the disappearance of this man were explained — or, what is equally to the point, thoroughly established.”

“Then your conscience must be satisfied,” answered the girl, with a quick lift of her chin.

"Cicely!" cried her grandmother, seeing nothing but disgraceful detection ahead if the search were permitted; but the girl held her high-handed course as she had done from the first. Never before had the old lady been subordinate so long in a scene where authority was the keynote.

"Certainly, grandma, Major Bailey must search the house if he feels it his duty — father would wish it. But the dining-room door is opening. Major, grandma will wish you to have some refreshments before you begin your task. Will you give her your arm to the table?"

"The raiders and foragers have left us very little in the way of variety of eatables, but mammy's coffee sack is like the widow's cruse of oil — there is always a little left," said the old lady, and with a gracious: "Gentlemen, you will all come with us," she went down the hall with the major, her cane tapping the polished floor lightly.

The others fell in behind, but as Minna passed the newel post Cicely caught her sharply by the arm. "I need you; come," she whispered; and the two of them, gripping hands, raced up the stair, their lightly shod feet making no noise, Cicely whispering something of her quickly formed plan. But the moment her dark head appeared above the railing Fairlee's door flew wide open.

"What is it?" he cried. "I cannot stay here and not be sure you are safe — it is a positive torture."

"Go back! Will you spoil everything?" she answered sternly. "I am safe unless you are seen. Oh, yes; I am taking a desperate chance, but it must be or you are lost. Go back — go back to your room!"

"Cicely — Miss Houston — answer me one question — you are not risking yourself for me? I cannot, I will not, permit it."

She caught him by the sleeve and pushed him back through the open door: "It is for me to permit things, not you. Must I remind you again that you are my prisoner? Hush!" she whispered, as he would have interrupted her. "I am safe unless they find you, and even if they do I shall not suffer any harm; but you must not be found! This room is the secret chamber of the house; these men do not know of its existence. There, they are coming — in with you, quick!"

She had pushed him back a step farther into the room and was closing the door before he could prevent her.

"If I hear anything that threatens you I shall come out and give myself up," he cried; and for answer she locked the door in his face.

"Now, Jake, the wardrobe! Quick — roll it before the door as it has stood for years. Lend a hand, Minna. There, steady, not so loud."

And under their combined efforts the massive mahogany crept creakily a few feet down the floor

and settled into its old place, blotting out all suggestion of the door behind it. Cicely staggered against the rail that framed the opening for the stair, her hand over her heart.

"Dear me, but that was a strain! Now, Jake, go down and keep the servants away from these men. Make them understand that if they betray Captain Fairlee's presence here both father and General Sherman will be very angry — anything to scare them into silence."

Minna, who was peering through the railing to the hall below, whispered: "They have finished their coffee, Cicely — they are coming up stairs."

From below Major Bailey's voice arose apologetically, "I assure you, Mrs Houston, I feel very apprehensive lest this fellow, hiding about the house, may do some mischief. I could not leave without satisfying myself that you are quite safe."

The stair creaked under his heavy tread, and behind him came several other soldiers. Minna turned her big eyes toward Cicely. "What next?" she asked.

Cicely pushed her into a chair and with nervous haste undid the bright braids that bound her head. "We came up to comb your hair," she whispered; "it was dreadfully mussed, and you wished to be tidy for visitors." Minna caught the suggestion and giggled.

"Dear me, how delightfully exciting; it's nearer

to a play than anything I ever did in my life! Do you suppose the sergeant will come up with him? And hasn't he the *loveliest* eyes! I simply *adore* blue eyes."

In another minute the major had gained the head of the stair, and stopped at sight of the two girls, revealed as they were by the light of the swinging lamp overhead. He spoke to his followers, who dispersed through the adjoining rooms; then he came to the girls under the lamp.

"So you two deserted us at supper. That was not kind. And what are you doing up here?"

Cicely laughed as she tucked in the end of a braid and curled a stray little lock over her fingers, lifting Minna's face to study the effect a moment. Then leaning forward she said confidentially, "it is woman's vanity, major; you see," as the young sergeant passed down the hall, "you carry around with you an uncommonly good-looking aide-de-camp."

The old man's eyes twinkled, "I had not observed that McHenry had any special claim to good looks."

"We women have keener eyes for a man's beauty, especially my cousin here. She is much impressed with the young man, and did not wish to appear frowzy before him. And now, since I have tidied her hair, if you have no objection she will go and keep the handsome sergeant from losing himself in this big house."

Minna obeyed the surreptitious touch on her shoulder and rose, laughing foolishly, for she had caught the cue of Cicely's wishes.

"Certainly," said the major; "and will you not also come — I might get lost myself."

"In that case I will organize a relief party and come after you. In the meantime I will remain here and give the searchers any information they may want." To leave that part of the hall seemed unwise; so many things might happen.

Minna went tripping down the hall, calling to McHenry that she would carry his candle, but the major, with a curious look at Cicely, drew a second chair forward and, waving her to the one Minna had occupied, seated himself.

"I do not imagine my men need me, and so I will watch with you here."

"As you please."

He looked up and down the long hall with its numerous doors: "You have six rooms on this floor."

"Yes," she answered, thinking of the hidden seventh, inwardly quaking lest some movement be made within it that would catch the major's ear; for that he mistrusted her statement of Fairlee's departure was perfectly apparent.

"It is a beautiful place, and certainly it is a mercy and a wonder that the Federals left the house standing."

"They would not have done so had it not been for

Captain Fairlee, this man you are hunting as a camp-trailer," she answered quickly, and told him the story of that day the raiders came. He smiled.

"All men, even the worst, have their good moments, Miss Houston — some from instinct, others under compulsion of pretty eyes. I imagine it would have taken much of the brute to resist you that day. But tell me about this old house. Even in my far off county we have heard snatches of its romantic history. It has a — a haunted room, is it?"

"All old houses are credited with apartments like that, Major Bailey."

"Yes, but I have some curiosity to see this special room."

"Oh, I assure you the ghost does not walk so early in the evenings," she laughed, wishing Minna would come back with the soldiers.

"There would be no chance to call it up by incantations? And if it came we might put on it the handcuffs intended for this Yankee captain." He leaned forward, smiling, with a queer, teasing emphasis.

The quick blood was pounding at her wrists, but she looked him straight in the eyes as she answered lightly, "They would be a misfit, for ghosts are ethereal, and Captain Fairlee must weigh as much as the ordinary man."

"Still, I have a fancy to see the room."

She got up and crossing the floor opened the door of a large room, dark except for the firelight from the pine logs on the hearth. "For four generations some member of the family has died in this room. The servants are afraid to enter it after night fall. Do you share their dread?" He had followed and was looking over her shoulder, and she waved him in.

"Since the ghost does not walk so early in the evening there would be no danger. Unless the light deceives me," he added, "this room is decorated in yellow."

"Yes — yellow." She felt her nails in her palm. Would he trap her after all? But he did not pursue the subject; though the glance he gave her had in it something more than admiration.

"Well, my curiosity is gratified. But this wardrobe across the hall," he continued as she closed the door and they moved back toward their chairs; "could the Federal captain have hidden himself in it?"

"The key is in the door, if you care to see for yourself."

"Well, if not in it, how about — behind it?" Again in his voice was that queer emphasis, and her heart leaped throbbingly.

"You could not get so much as your hand between it and the wall, and I told you the Yankee officer was not ethereal."

Again he looked at her admiringly; but the searching party at last came down the attic stair, and interrupted his answer.

"We have had a great time; it was just like a game of hide-and-hunt-the-switch. I felt myself starting to say, 'Who burns, who burns?' as the children do when they think some one is near the hidden switch," panted Minna, the candle-light on her face making her very charming.

"But what did you find?" asked the major.

"Oh, Mr. McHenry is quite satisfied no one is hiding in the house, for we found nothing."

"Then we will take McHenry's word for it. But I am quite sure he could not say he lost nothing in such company," and the major touched his gallant old heart, smiling significantly at the radiant girl.

But Minna was sweetly uncomprehending. "Did you really lose something, Mr. McHenry? Shall we go back and hunt it?" she asked demurely.

"It would only be lost more irretrievably, you little minx; I'll make him wish he were fifty-five and gray-headed," laughed the major, kissing her lightly on the brow. "I soldiered with your uncles in Mexico, my child," he laughed in explanation; and they all turned toward the stair.

In the hall below Grandma Houston sat in her high-backed chair, surrounded by the women of the household, all anxiously awaiting the result

of the search. The old lady stood up to meet the major.

"I shall send your son good news of you, madam. And now, being soldiers on a mission, we must ride. It is an honour to have been under your roof."

Then the good-bys began, each member of the household sending some message to a friend or a relative in the Confederate camp. But Minna and the Irish sergeant said their farewell in the starlight on the porch. Major Bailey found Cicely leaning against the newel post of the stair.

"I am an old compaigner, Miss Houston, and I always take off my hat to three things no matter where I find them — courage, gratitude, and resourcefulness. And in you I find them all combined, so imagine me thrice bareheaded."

"You talk in riddles, Major Bailey."

He lifted her hand to his lips with the grace and courtesy of the days of powder and patches: "The search had to be to satisfy my men, they had heard so much of your prisoner; but, Cicely Houston, I know enough of your family history to be quite sure that none of us has seen inside your romantically haunted chamber. Look to it, my child, that the history of your rose-room does not have another chapter."

CHAPTER XIII

THE AFTERMATH OF THE SEARCH

The atmosphere of home! How bright it floats around us —
Park Benjamin
Judges and senators have been bought for gold — Pope

UNDER the united effort of several pairs of hands the big wardrobe rolled slowly back, and Cicely, throwing open the door behind it, swayed exhaustedly against the lintel.

"They are gone," she said to the man waiting there.

Nodding to Fairlee, Lena and Minna passed on into the room and stood warming their hands by the smouldering fire, while Jake busied himself with the candles. Fairlee's back was toward the others as he faced Cicely in the doorway. He took her unresisting hands and held them to his breast, and his low voice reached only her ears.

"It was you who saved me. Why did you do it?"

But she could not speak; the reaction of the strain through which she had just passed was upon her; she saw him before her, alive and unharmed, and something rose up in her throat and choked her. Closer he held her hands.

"Why did you do it?" Is it that you care ever so — ?"

The words roused her; she drew her fingers sharply from his grasp: "A jailer is in honour bound to protect her prisoner."

"Again you have to remind me of our relations. Yes, I am still your prisoner, and a hundred fold more deeply your debtor."

"It was not I only who protected you; everybody helped."

"I understand; but the others only followed your lead. I have no fancy for a Southern prison or for a pillager's ignominious death; therefore I am grateful to each of you."

She moved nervously, her hand drumming on the door panel.

"Let us walk a minute in the hall; we are both too wrought up to sit still," he said. So they paced slowly the length of the long hall while she rehearsed for him the scenes with the Confederate major. But when they came a second time to the window-seat at the end of the passage, they sank down upon it, as glad of the rest as they had been of the momentary exercise, so subtly did any change appeal to her overstrained nerves. The swinging lamp lit the hall sufficiently for them to see each other's face, while the moonbeams made a spider-like network of shadows as they slanted through the needled pines outside and flooded the window.

"Tell me again Major Bailey's parting words," Fairlee said, his elbow on his knee and his head on his hand, so that he looked up into her face.

"He said that the search had to be to satisfy his men; but that he was quite sure that none of them had seen inside of our 'romantically haunted room.' Oh, I felt all along that he mistrusted me!"

"But you had shown him what was really the haunted room, the one of which the servants are afraid."

"Yes, but he noticed that it was yellow in decoration, and he — he spoke of the other as rose-coloured."

A sudden break in the girl's voice made him feel that she was withholding something from him.

"Did he know the story of the rose-room?"

"Yes; and he —"

In a flash he read the major's suspicion: "And he thought, he presumed to suggest, that perhaps I, like that other man who was nursed here, might — but no, he could not have imagined anything so utterly impossible!"

She stood up restlessly. He had guessed her thought accurately, but that phase of the matter could not be discussed between them: "I never attached any weight to that foolish superstition about the room; it makes an interesting story, but there will be no third act to the drama. Major

Bailey took an unintentional liberty in suggesting it. Let us join the girls."

But he drew her insistently to her seat: "Wait a moment; I have something else to say: evidently the major does not wish to take me into custody — taking your word for it that I am not a menace to any woman — so for the time being I am safe. But what of the next body of scouts that comes this way?"

"We will hide you again."

"It can scarcely be done successfully a second time. Somebody will betray the secret — unwittingly, perhaps — or else some of the scouts may know of the rose-room, and the search will be successful."

"Nobody else shall search the house."

"You may not be able to prevent it; they are of your party, but they may give you the same excuse of wishing to rid you of a dangerous nuisance."

"We will tell them Major Bailey made a thorough examination."

"One man might accept that as sufficient, another might not. No, there is but one course open: you must either send me away, or the next time they demand me you must give me up."

She had turned to the window away from the lamp, but even in the moonlight he saw that little flame of fight kindling in her eyes.

"Did you give me up to that rough forager with the coarse hands?"

"That is another matter."

"Did you give up my house to be burned? Did you give up my old grandmother and all these tender women and children to be turned out to meet the trials of the winter in the cabins and out-houses — many of them perhaps to die from the exposure?"

"Even that is different."

"Perhaps, but it is rooted in the same principle. Believe me, Captain Fairlee, my interest in you is one of gratitude ——"

"I have never dared to hope it was otherwise, no matter how deeply I might wish it."

The white moonlight hid the tingle of colour in her cheeks, but he saw her bosom heave with a swift emotion.

"I have never given you the right to say such things to me."

"No, you have not; but where a man's heart is concerned he does not ask for the right to speak; he simply takes it."

"Then," she said, rising, "we had as well end this interview."

"Not yet — wait just a minute more. I want to say that I cannot bear for you to undergo another ordeal such as this of to-day. Physically you cannot stand it. See, you are still trembling from the effects." He touched her hand, which she tried in vain to make steady under his fingers. "I want

you to promise me that you will not subject yourself to this disagreeable strain — the humiliation of detection would be unbearable. Since you will not agree to surrender me, let me take my chances in my own way."

"And your way would be to — No, no; it is quite useless for us to go over this again. As long as you are my prisoner I shall do my best to protect you."

"And if I cease to be your prisoner?"

"That can only be when you are taken from me by a stronger authority or when the war is over."

They stood face to face in the belt of moonlight, and for a silent moment looked into each other's eyes.

"Until the war is over — you intend to hold me that long?"

She nodded slowly: "If necessary."

"You have decided," he said at last; and they turned silently back to the room where Lena and Minna still waited in the ruddy firelight.

"Well, Captain," said Minna, her saucy face turned up from where she sat on the rug roasting an apple before the bed of coals, "the Yankees haven't taken Savannah yet, so maybe I'll get my white dress after all."

"I would not advise Mr. Howell to get leave of absence just yet if the wedding depends on General

Sherman's not capturing Savannah," he smiled back at her.

"Oh, it is not Joe Howell now. There is another star on the horizon, a star of the very first magnitude. Major Bailey was a horrid thing to insist on searching the house for you, but his sergeant — oh, his sergeant was perfectly dear! You never saw such broad shoulders, such twinkling blue eyes, such a — a promising little moustache."

They all laughed, and Cicely, with a sudden relaxing as of mental muscles, leaned down and kissed her lightly on the hair. "I told you you would have a dozen changes of heart before the war ended, you chameleon-natured girl!" she laughed.

"At that time I was not interested in any one but Joe, for I had not met Sergeant McHenry. You would have lost your own heart had you not been so busy parrying with the old major and — thinking of some one else who is far away. I declare, I do not know which of you two girls I feel the sorrier for — Lena for never thinking of any lover at all, or you for pinning your thoughts to just one."

She leaned forward and turned the spluttering apple with the care of a chef and did not see the red that mounted to Lena's face, or the quick, hard tightening of Fairlee's lips as he looked at Cicely.

"You are an incorrigible little flirt," said Cicely,

feeling Fairlee's eyes upon her, but refusing to return the look.

"No," answered Minna, biting gingerly at the hot apple. "I was only born with an appreciative soul."

"That seems rather to put us beyond the circle of the elect, Lena," laughed Cicely; and the man saw the tenderness with which she drew the younger girl to her. Her gentleness with Lena had several times revealed to him the depths of her true womanliness.

"Lena, can't you make me a picture of Sergeant McHenry and his little moustache? Something like those you made of Ray and his cap."

"You did not let Lena look at him close enough to catch a likeness," teased Cicely.

"She had quite as good a chance to look at him as she had to study Ray, with him dangling after you."

The shoulder against Cicely trembled. "Minna, you greedy girl, give me a bite of that apple!" she cried, making a swoop for it. Minna resisted, and there was a momentary scramble on the rug; then Cicely sprang up, one loosened braid falling to her waist, her eyes sparkling, her mouth full of the juicy pulp. Fairlee looked at her with a new admiration. Was this laughing hoyden the same grave Cicely who had refused to listen to his pleading in the hall awhile ago — the same Cicely with

the fighting eyes who had faced him so dauntlessly with that naked sword and bade him remember his captivity? A charming picture the three romping girls made, intimately homelike; and the homeless soldier warmed his heart with it, remembering that but for the gayest of the three he might be now on his way to some desolate prison, or perhaps facing a file of loaded muskets, unable to convince his captors that he was not a deserting 'bummer.' Truly this Southland he was fighting held many a rare jewel in its rebellious old heart!

Marie and Dick ran in to say supper was ready, and the little girl caught him by the hand.

"And you're to come down stairs too, cap'un, 'stead of staying up here all by yourself. Jake put you right next to me 'cause I asked him; and Dranma Houston done told everybody not to talk secesh, 'cause your feelings would be hurtet," prattled the child.

"Hush, Marie; grandma didn't mean you to say that — you always tell everything you know," said Dick reprovingly.

But Fairlee's hand closed warmly over the child's. "It was very generous in your grandmother to think of it." And then they followed the three girls through the door that Dick was holding open, Marie sorrowfully confiding to him the information that Cicely said Santa Claus would not come to Pinehurst this year because the Yankee "bummers"

would take his sleigh and reindeer. Did the captain think they would?

After supper the family assembled in the library, the children begging somebody to "tell tales," all the older women with sewing or knitting, for they never ceased to think of the soldiers in the field and the inability of the government at Richmond to supply their crying needs. Grandma Houston politely offered to play cribbage with the guest, but he pleaded ignorance of the game and found a chair next to Minna and her guitar. Cicely sat near a table a few feet away, "toeing" off the sock Cousin Maria had knit for Ray.

"You are wonderfully improved, Captain Fairlee; you begin to look like another man," Minna said, as she tuned her instrument.

"I am quite strong enough to go away, Miss Minna, and relieve you of my care."

"Won't Cicely parole you?"

"I do not wish to be paroled. I have already been too long out of the fighting."

"I think the war would be perfectly lovely if you soldiers would just ride around in your uniforms, and quit killing each other."

He laughed, and Cicely's red mouth curved in a smile.

"When we stop killing each other there will be no more war."

"I suppose not. Do you really like to be a

soldier — like to fight and kill people, Captain Fairlee?"

"Since I am a soldier I do not like to be out of the fighting, but liking to fight is a different thing."

"Then why do you not quit it?"

"Perhaps I shall — after the war is over."

"Well, don't until after you are married. I think a military wedding with the groom in full-dress uniform, and the bride in ——"

"In white Paris muslin?"

"No, in white satin and lace — oh, that would be beautiful!"

"It would depend on who wore the white satin and lace."

"That would not matter so much; all brides are beautiful — behind their veils. It is the inalienable right of a bride."

Lena came to the table and sat down with her pencil.

"Are you making my picture of Sergeant Mc-Henry?" Minna asked.

"No. I am drawing Captain Fairlee."

"That is taking an undue advantage of him," said Cicely, speaking for the first time, "for of course you will ask his opinion of it, and his self-esteem will not allow him to run down his own likeness."

"On the contrary, Miss Lena, I shall be very exacting; so do not give me a crooked nose or

a moustache that is only promising," laughed Fairlee.

Minna made a wry little face at him, then sang a song, a war ditty that pleased him greatly.

"Since you are so crazy about war and Cicely won't parole you, why do you not run away? I should think you'd like to," she said.

Cicely looked up quickly, and her glance met his comprehendingly. Then he smiled. "Like to run away from Miss Houston — and from you and Miss Lena? Do you think I have no bump of appreciation on this knotty cranium of mine, Miss Minna?"

She looked at him over the fretted neck of her guitar: "I did not know that Yankees were nice like that; I thought they had — had —— "

"Hoofs and horns?"

"On their manners, yes. But you say almost as gallant things as our own men. Why, even Ray never turned a prettier compliment than that, and Ray has a genius for saying nice things — oh, not to me," she added quickly, seeing him begin to laugh. "Ray carries his pretty speeches to — to another market."

Cicely got up abruptly and crossed the room to Cousin Maria; and Lena's pencil slipped, so that if Fairlee's nose was not crooked his shoulder was.

"I am afraid you have annoyed Miss Houston," he said, looking after her.

"Oh, no; Cicely is not easily teased: and — "



body knows how Ray adores her. He never had any other sweetheart in his life."

But Fairlee was not listening; he was watching instead with curious interest the face bent over the cardboard on the table. Why should that childish mouth have such a sensitive quiver? Then he recalled the girl's blush when Ray had been mentioned up stairs before supper, and remembered, too, Cicely's quick change of the subject. What sorrowful, perhaps unconscious, little heart tragedy was being enacted here?

"Is the picture finished?" he asked, as Lena got up from the table.

"No; I have broken my pencil. I'll finish it to-morrow."

"She always makes me think of some delicate wildflower," he said, watching her as she stopped by Grandma Houston's chair. "Miss Houston seems very much attached to her."

"Yes; Lena is younger than the rest of us, and Cicely has always been her champion. Many a time she has made me share my goodies with her, and I have seen her pull Ray's hair like a little tigress for imposing on Lena — when we were little, of course."

"And Lieutenant Clinch ——"

"Ray is not any kin to Lena; he is our cousin on the other side. I wish Cicely would come and sing this duet with me."

Half an hour later Fairlee approached Mrs. Houston's chair: "I wish to thank you for the privilege of spending the evening with you. I find I am invalid enough to be a little tired, so I am asking permission to retire."

"I trust you will sleep well. Good-night."

He bent over the old lady's hand, bowed to the group about her, and moved away to the door. There he paused, looking back on the assembled company with eyes that glowed a little.

"What is it?" Cicely asked, crossing to his side.

"I was only admiring and perhaps envying the spirit of homeness that pervades your circle. You see I never before saw so large a family assembled like this. It — it makes me feel like a tramp, a piece of driftwood in the current of life; for I am practically without family ties."

"If you enjoy the home atmosphere, why are you leaving so early?"

"I fear I am a restraint upon you. I am going up stairs to let you all talk 'secesh', as Marie says."

They had crossed the hall as they spoke, and now stood before the fireplace, where the flames from the pine knots leaped and spluttered, dispelling the gloom and chill of the mild December night.

"I have talked 'secesh' to you by the hour, and you have listened." She smiled up at him with a sudden flash of mischief in her glance.

"Yes; but you are — my jailer."

The smile went out of her eyes as she sank into a chair before the fire, her hands loosely locked over her dark dress, making an entrancing picture with the crimson cushion behind throwing her head into strong relief. At the corner of the mantel, just where the ring of firelight began to die, he stood with his elbow on the marble shelf, eagerly taking in her beauty and her grace.

"Need we always remember that?"

He bent forward, meeting her lifted eyes with a look that made her own lids fall: "Do you wish us to forget it?"

She laced and interlaced her fingers slowly: "There is a time for everything, and to-night ——"

"To-night we may forget this?"

"At least we may not talk about it."

"And I am also forbidden to talk of that other captivity of — my heart?"

Her hands ceased to interlock each other and rested on the arms of the chair: "Really, Captain Fairlee, I shall have to order you back to bed and have mammy brew you a quieting tea; the delirium fancies still linger with you."

"And will continue to do so all my life. No potion that the most skilled alchemist could brew will ever be able to kill your image in my soul. I watch you every moment you are in my sight; and when you are gone I close my eyes and go

over in memory every look, every gesture, every word ——”

“Captain Fairlee, I forbid ——”

“Oh, I know my uniform puts me beyond your pale! I am only a wounded Yankee — one of Sherman’s abhorred foragers, but I have a man’s eyes and a man’s heart, and a man’s power and right to love! What does the colour of a coat matter when the happiness of a lifetime is at stake?”

Her palm was shading her face, leaving him to guess at her anger. “It is just possible that there is something more than the colour of a coat between us.”

“You mean there is another man? Will you not give me an equal chance with him?”

Her hand slipped from her face and with head tilted back against the crimson cushion she looked straight at him: “Seriously, Captain Fairlee, I must have Cousin Maria look at your tongue and take your pulse in the morning; all these things you are saying are fever symptoms.”

There was a stir in the library, and a high thin voice came through the half-open door, interrupting his reply. The girl laid her finger on her lips with an intimate gesture of comprehension.

“It is Grandma Houston beginning family prayers. Will you go back and join us?”

“You will pray for the success of the Confederate arms, and I could not say ‘amen’ very sincerely to that, could I?”

She laughed softly: "No more than I could pray honestly for Sherman's victory. So we will say good-night."

She was standing on the rug and he stepped forward and took her hand, holding it momentarily in both of his: "I fear I am not much of a praying man, but whenever I wake in the night and think of you and the peril of the times, I find myself saying 'God keep her!' Will you say the same to me?"

Into her dark eyes there came a soft, reverent light: "God keep you in his care, no matter where you are."

"Thank you. Good-night." She had motioned toward the stair, and he obeyed the silent dismissal, tiptoeing up the steps that the company in the library might not be disturbed. Near the top he paused and looked back. Through the half-closed door came the murmur of many voices, united in a common supplication. But Cicely had not joined them. She stood on the rug, wrapped in the warm glow of the flame; her face was lifted and her clasped hands lay over her breast. For whom was the prayer on her parted lips? Was she praying for Raymond Clinch, near Sherman's murderous guns?

"Jake," said Fairlee, as he entered his room and found the old negro waiting for his accustomed nightly services, "did you not say there was one of the plantation negroes who had several times

run away and who wants to go again to the Yankees?"

"Yes, sir; Big Ben. He been to S'vannah some several times. Ole miss doan know it, but he liable ter go ergin any night."

"How does he go?"

"He know de way fru de swamps jes lak er rabbit, sir."

"Well, Jake, I want to talk to him. Can you not manage it for me? I have a message to send General Sherman."

"A message to Gen'ul Sherman?" asked Jake suspiciously.

"Yes; I must have some money. Listen," and Fairlee's voice went on persuasively for a few moments. When he had finished the old man's eyes brightened, then watered at the sight of what was in his outstretched hand.

O heart of the world, beating with the tempered time of Caucasian blood, or with the fierce throb of the Afric sun, when is it that you have not been snared by the lure of gold!



CHAPTER XIV

THE WINDOW OF ESCAPE

Who fares forth into the night?
Who fares forth into the dark?

THE morning sunshine flooded the dining-room. The blessing was finished, and with a reverent "amen" Grandma Houston unclasped her wrinkled white hands and lifted her head. The hum of voices and subdued rattle of spoons and forks began to mingle as the meal was served. Glancing down the table the old lady noticed the empty chair next to Marie. Punctuality at breakfast was one of the few rules of the house.

"Is Captain Fairlee not so well this morning, Jake?" she asked of the old butler. "I had hoped to see him with us regularly."

"I doan know, ole miss; he ain' ringed his bell yit."

"I expect the unusual excitement of spending the evening down stairs tired him," remarked Cousin Maria.

"Our family gatherings *are* such dissipations!" sighed Minna ironically. "Knitting soldiers' socks,

scraping lint, and preparing hospital bandages are the very acme of things exciting."

"Minna, my dear," said grandma from her end of the table, "I cannot hear what you are saying, but from the expression of your face I know it is something sarcastic. Remember that whoever has sarcasm for breakfast has dyspepsia for dinner."

"Yes, grandma," replied the girl, apparently rebuked, but inwardly giggling. Then added over her shoulder: "Jake, give me a hot waffle to eat with my sarcasm." Which set Dick off in a gulping snicker.

"And I am sure Captain Fairlee did no knitting, lint-scraping or bandage-tearing," said Lena, "for you sang to him all the evening."

"Did I? Well, then, I flatter myself that my siren voice soothed him into such beautiful dreams that he cannot shake them off. I wonder what kind of a girl he dreams about, fair or dark? Couldn't you ask him while you are finishing his picture to-day, Lena?"

"In other words, I am to ask him if he dreams of you?"

"Oh, no; Sergeant McHenry's star is still too much in the ascendant for me to consider any one else. But it is a thousand pities that Captain Fairlee is only a Yankee; it narrows down his opportunities so decidedly."

"For instance?" queried Lena.



"He might have found a sweetheart here in Georgia."

"Don't you suppose he has one in Connecticut?"

"Two sweethearts are not exactly a legion, Lena. But I asked him the question, and he said there was a girl who used to live next to him when they were children and whom he had afterward met at West Point; but when I questioned him closely he could not even tell me the colour of her eyes."

"You certainly presumed on your acquaintance to ask him."

"By no means. The happiest chance that can fall to a man, separated from his beloved one, is to find an auditor who is willing to be bored with descriptions and accounts of her. I offered myself as the sacrifice."

"Minna," said grandma magisterially, "worldly wisdom is quite as bad for a girl's digestion as sarcasm."

"Yes, grandma; I was only enlightening Lena; she never had a sweetheart, so is uninformed."

"Lena's knowledge of sweethearts will come soon enough; it would have been better if you yourself had been less precocious in that line."

"I dare say I should have learned my alphabet and catechism more readily," but the dancing hazel eyes belied the humility of the voice, but grandma only heard the words, and thought her arrow of reproof had sped to its mark.

"Jake," said Cicely, from behind the coffee urn, "go and see that Captain Fairlee's fire is laid and that he has everything he needs. Ask if he will have his breakfast served up stairs."

Five minutes later the old man returned. "He sleepin' mighty soun' dis mornin', missy," he said, speaking into her ear from the rear of her chair. "I done knock, but he ain answer."

She sipped her coffee quietly for a minute, then suddenly summoned him again to her side: "Does Captain Fairlee usually sleep with his door locked?" Her voice was so low that it reached him only.

"No'rm; I ain never foun' it locked befo'."

"Go up stairs and knock again — loud; he may not be well."

But a sense of unexplained uneasiness took away her appetite, and presently she put down her coffee cup and went into the hall. The long apartment was cheery with the freshly kindled fire, and flooded at one end with flickering lights, every colour of the spectrum, as the early sunshine streamed through the stained-glass window to the east, and glanced and swam and glimmered upon the polished floor. It had always been a favourite act of hers to come here in the early morning and watch the brilliant mosaic of reds and greens and yellows and blues spread out like a phantom carpet. As a child she had revelled in the brilliant shifting and blending

of the shades, as a girl it had often soothed an impatient mood. But now she hardly noticed the breaking up and quick reforming of the pattern as the wind moved the magnolia branches just outside the window. A curious restlessness possessed her. She stooped and stirred the wood fire between the andirons, sending a thousand crackling sparks up the black-throated chimney. She looked at her hand curiously, for it trembled on the poker.

"I done knock, an' I done call — an' he doan mek no answer," said Jake behind her. "Jes' lak somebody daid in dar."

For one moment she was motionless, gripping the iron poker hard, then it fell to the floor, and she darted past the negro up the stair. Before the door through which, on her mission as nurse, she had passed so often during the past weeks, she paused.

"Captain Fairlee!" She knew the call would be useless, yet she made it. During the silence which followed, her eyes travelled from the top of the door to the bottom; then suddenly remained fixed on one object. There it lay, partly under the door as if thrust forward from the farther side, the shining brass key. Almost she had known she would find it there, waiting for her. Just so had another Cicely, in the long-ago years, found it on just such a sun-flooded morning, a little point of dazzle on the darker, duller floor. For a long moment she

looked down upon it, then mechanically she stooped and picked it up.

The unlocked door swung wide upon its noiseless hinges, and Cicely, after a moment's hesitation and one more call, stepped across the threshold. It might, indeed, have been a chamber of the dead, so silent and shadowy it was; the chairs were all in place, the bed was undisturbed, and the ashes of last night's fire lay gray upon the hearth. With a backward reach of her hand, the girl closed the door behind her and stood in the semi-twilight, her eyes moving slowly from one piece of the dark mahogany furniture to another, as if, in spite of her conviction, she expected to discover some animate object beside it. A gust of wind blew around the angle of the house outside, and in it one of the rose-hued curtains stirred with a flash of vivid colour. It was the window in the gable up which the tough ivy vines clambered. Hastily she crossed the floor and drew aside the curtain.

The window behind it was open, and far down the perpendicular, ivy-mantled wall was a trail of crushed leaves and broken twigs, marking where hands had clung and feet had found a momentary resting place. It was the old trail, the old signs, the old, old story. Thus he had gone, by the same route the other occupants had chosen back in the far, faded years. Out over the sill the girl bent, following the trail, shuddering at sight of a big



branch that had pulled away from the wall and might have meant destruction to the climber. But at last she moved back and stood on the rug beside the cold hearth in whose ruddy glow she had last night laughed so carelessly. She was no longer a jailer — her prisoner had escaped, gone without a word of farewell, a token of regret, gone back to the enemy's camp. Something caught in her throat, a queer little, gurgling breath, and she shivered so in the draught that she crossed again to the window and closed it. There was a strange shake in her knees, and she sank down into the big chair against whose rose-tinted damask Fairlee had so often joyed to watch her dark head with its clear profile. But she had left the curtains slightly apart, and a single ray of sunshine, like a pointing index-finger, slanted through the crevice and struck upon the table across the rug from her. And there, under the beam, quivering as though it had come on purpose to seek it out, lay something white, something she knew was for her. With a little cry, the first sound she had uttered since entering the room, Cicely sprang up, bending down to the table. Twice she read the name across the envelope before she caught it up: "Miss Houston, Personal." Then, just where the slanting sunbeam struck against the table's edge and slipped downward, she dropped upon the rug and broke the seal of the letter. He had gone to the enemy's camp, but

at least he had left some word of sorrow for the act. She forgot that the room was chilly as she drew out the white sheets covered with that square, masculine writing, and spread them on her knee. Sitting thus in that shaft of light with the ambushed shadows about her, she seemed like a glorified picture out of some illuminated volume of old days when painters found the soul behind the flesh and pictured it. Her face was flushed, her mouth slightly a-tremble, her long lashes swept her cheek, and her bosom rose and fell with her quick breathing as she read:

THE ROSE ROOM, 11 p. m.

How am I to address you? If I say "My dear Miss Houston," I outrage the warmth of my own feelings; and if I say "Cicely, beloved," I offend you. Let each of us choose in our thoughts the salutation that pleases best.

I am going away; all of my plans for escape are made. You will not release me, and I will not remain to be a source of anxiety and danger to you, and a prey to the next searchers. After the experience of to-day I dare not stay, for either you must draw upon yourself the odium of sheltering a Northern spy, or else you must give me up to the untender mercies of Wheeler's scouts. You remember that by the hall window last night I begged you to let me take my chances in my own way? Well, that is what I am doing now, in spite of your refusal. In so doing I am violating no principle of war, for in its rules there is nothing that forbids a captive from seeking his liberty when the way seems open. Thus I go without any conscientious scruples. Big Ben is to be my guide. I bribed him with my last gold piece and the promise of more when he reached the Union lines. He knows the swamps and by-paths like a creature of the woods, and feels sure of keeping me in safe ways. When



I left you in the hall an hour ago I did not dream the parting was a final one, for I anticipated some delay in making my arrangements. But Ben is ready and as eager as a child to be gone, and every hour is precious. At twelve we are to start. If anything happens to me, if I am captured or killed, it is my fault; no one else is to blame.

I am going back to the ranks, back to my company, and, as you would say, back to fight those dear to you. But I pray none of your kith or kin may cross my path. I must do my duty to my flag, but in my heart is no war against Cicely Houston's people. You will believe that, will you not? How could I willingly do a harm to any one you loved?

And now for my farewell to you. I said I went without a scruple of conscience, but my heart is heavy. What these past weeks have been to me you can but faintly imagine — these blessed weeks in which, in your gentle womanliness, you have nursed me back to life. So dear is the memory of them that the pain of the wound is all forgotten, and I could find it in my heart to wish that this was the night when you first brought me to this room in that bloody blanket instead of the one on which I am to take my leave of you and slip away to the stress and storm of battle. For the gratitude that fills my heart for all your goodness and sweetness I have no words. If you owed me anything for saving your house the debt is more than cancelled. A man's life outweighs a dwelling place.

Whether you are pledged to Raymond Clinch I cannot fathom. But I know from your cousins and from Milly that you are the one sweetheart of his life, and I can only presume that he has your preference in return. It is the bitterest thought that could come to me! For I, too, love you, Cicely Houston, with all my soul and strength. If I fall in the strife for Savannah, over my heart will be found your colours — the bit of gray ribbon you gave me that memorable first day, in your charming audacity daring me to wear it. It is the one thing besides memories that I carry out of your house. Will you wear the other piece? and will you let us, here and now, renew over them

the same pledge of mutual help with which they were first exchanged? As long as I wear mine the promise will bind me.

I am looking around this dear room for the last time, going over past days, and recalling its history. To-night for the third time one who has shared its comfort and hospitality will slip out of the window, and the old ivy boughs will know once more the clinging weight of a man fleeing into the night. But there is this great difference between me and those other two — I leave behind no broken faith, no woman's heart that loves me or will grieve for me. Instead, I carry the pain with me; it is *my* heart that is empty and aching, *my* heart that must forever be alone and desolate.

The history of the rose-room has been reversed!

Farewell, Cicely! I put my lips to this page, knowing that your dear eyes must rest upon it, your dear hands must touch it. I wish for your happiness even though I may not share it.

Faithfully yours,

ALLYN FAIRLEE.

With the lifting of the morning sun that narrow beam across the table widened and whitened into a swarth of light, and the curtains before the unshuttered window made a glory of colour that permeated and tinged even the shadows that hung so heavily about the corners and angles of the polished furniture. But Cicely did not notice. Mechanically she folded the sheets of the letter and thrust them into her belt, then slowly rose to her feet. She looked about her; there was absolutely nothing left of him but memory; not a thing he had used, not even a glove. The room was as a page from which every trace of him had been erased.

She drew her hand across her eyes with a gesture of one suddenly weary.

The other gray ribbon, the match to the one over his heart? He had asked her to wear it; it must be there.

Quickly she crossed to the bed and drew back the pendant drapery of the tester. There it was, a gray mark upon the brilliant tone of the damask, just as she had pinned it on that sombre November day when they had brought him here. Those intervening weeks seemed like some strange whispering gallery of nature, for standing at this end of them now she heard again the echo of the gay words she had uttered at their beginning, down between the fluted white columns of the portico.

"Even as a queen honours her signet ring, so will I answer the call of this when you send it to me."

Would she wear it? Would she renew with him that compact of friendship and mutual aid? There could be no further question of aid or necessity between them, for they had played their little drama to its close, and the curtain had fallen to rise no more. Yet with hands that trembled a little, she loosed the silken strip from its place, and opening the throat of her gown she pinned it out of sight over her heart, and for a moment stood with her hand pressed tightly above it, her eyes on the unshuttered window of escape. Then, with a long,

nervous, shuddering sob that shook her whole body, she sank to her knees and hid her face in the bright drapery of the bed.

And from the gilt frame above the mantel the sad, black eyes of that older Cicely watched her, as though comprehending.

The rose-room had added another chapter to its history. Was the story reversed?

CHAPTER XV

CUPID RIDES WITH MARS

In peace love tunes the shepherd's reed;
In war he mounts the warrior's steed — Scott.

IT HAPPENED dis er-way, missy. When de cap'un come up stairs las' night, he ax me 'bout Big Ben an' his runnin'-er-ways. He say he want ter see 'im an' git 'im ter tek er message ter Gen'ul Sherman, 'caise he needin' some money an' clo'es. He ax ef Ben couldn't come up stairs an' shave 'im 'caise his face mighty rough, an' my han' is powerful trimblyfied wid me gittin' ole. Yo' pa 'll tell you dat."

"And you sent Ben up to him?"

"Yes, missy. I knowed Ben was gwine run erway ergin anyhow — seems lak it's in his blood an' in his laigs — an' dere warn't no 'jection ter his tekin' er message ter de gen'ul jes' 'bout some money, so I sont 'im up wid de hot water."

"How long was he up stairs?"

"Not so ve'y long; jes' whilst I was kiverin' de fires good, an' puttin' out de lights an' shetting up de house. When he come down he look mighty

smilin', but I thought de cap'un done gi' 'im sumpen fer de shavin', an' so I ain spicioned nothin' special."

"Did you know this morning that Ben was gone?"

"Not twell you done gone up ter de cap'un's do'. Den I went out ter de shack in de lo' groun's whar we hides de cattle, an' de cap'un's horse an' dat little one-eyed mule de Yankees lef us was bof gone; and I knowed pintedly how dey went."

Cicely sat down on the doorstep, for she and Jake were on the rear porch. So at least Fairlee was not afoot in the swamps; he had a chance to reach Savannah if only his guide was reliable and Major Bailey and his scouting party did not return too soon. She drew a long sigh of relief.

"I done hyeard de cap'un say some sev'ul times he gwine gi' you dat horse 'caise he had two mo' at camp. Seem mighty lak injun-givin' ter tek it erway," grumbled Jake.

"I did not want it, and he had to have it, Jake; he could not have walked from here to Savannah."

"No'rm, I doan reckon he could, bein' he was still so trimbly. He tole me ef he stayed here much longer he'd be tuk, or git you into trouble, so I 'spose it's er good thing he done went. But I wish he'd er made Ben walk; dar warn't no shaky jints in *his* laigs. Dat doan leave us but two mules ter

start de crap on, an' two mules ain er snitchin on dis big place."

"It is very hard, Jake, very hard. But maybe father will come before ploughing time and tell us what to do."

She leaned against the door-facing and looked across the cleared fields far away to the south-east where the dropping sky met the pines and mingled with them in a jagged line. There she knew the drifted brown needles carpeted the by-ways with silence, and up in the pines the wind was sighing eternally that wordless hymn that seemed to hold an echo of the woe of the world. Somewhere out there Fairlee was listening to it, perhaps being soothed by it.

"Do you think Big Ben is apt to lose his way in the swamps?" she asked at last.

"Who — *Ben*? He know de way lak you knows yo' books. I ain thinkin' 'bout dem; I'se thinkin' er dem two empty stalls in de shack stable," grumbled the old negro.

The news of Fairlee's escape created a stir in the house. Minna openly bewailed the loss of the only man left to them by the tide of war. Lena looked regretfully at her portfolio, thinking of the pleasure and assistance he had given her. Cousin Maria and Aunt Hinton talked of ingratitude; but Grandma Houston shook her wise old head.

"It is the best solution of our difficulty," she

said, in her autocratic way. "Of course after caring for him all this while, we did not wish to see him captured here in our midst; and it was certainly very awkward and humiliating to be obliged to hide him in our own house. Now, if Major Bailey takes him our skirts will be clear, our consciences at rest. We are not in his debt, for if he kept our house from the flames, we nursed him of his dangerous wound."

"But, Grandma Houston," said the incorrigible Minna, "he would not have been wounded if he had let the big soldier have his way about robbing Cicely."

"Minna, you are developing a very bad habit of trying to set your elders straight; young people sometimes see with very crooked eyes."

But Cicely patted the pouting girl on the arm, whispering that hers was the just view: "He got his wound protecting me, so the burden of gratitude was mostly mine."

The next day at dusk Major Bailey and his squad returned, having ridden far up into the heart of the state. The old soldier's face was hard and bitter with the sights he had seen.

"It cannot enter into the heart of man to conceive the desolation Sherman has left behind him," he said to Grandma Houston. "His path through the state, sixty miles wide, is as bare of food, cattle, or produce as the Sahara desert — only the sand

and siroccos of the latter are wanting to complete the likeness. Everything of value has been confiscated or stolen; farms are desolated, dwellings burned, cows and mules driven off or killed in the pastures. Nothing but chimneys and piles of brick mark the places where comfortable homes stood a few weeks ago. The half-starved women and children are living in huts and cabins with only the protection the good God gives them. In one place we found them searching the Federal camp ground for grains of corn the army mules had left from the night's feed, for that is all they will have for the spring planting. Nearly every house farther up the country was overflowing with exiles from Atlanta; and so for a second time Sherman, with the torches of his bummers, has made these tender, unoffending women homeless."

Mrs. Clinch lifted Helen's baby high before him: "I shall tell this child the story of his mother's death, and bid him tell it to his children and his children's children that they may forever abhor the name of Sherman!"

"Maria, Maria! remember the Lord has said 'vengeance is mine,'" admonished Grandma Houston.

"The Lord may claim the vengeance, for we will never be able to do so; but that does not take the hate out of our hearts," replied Mrs. Clinch, thinking of the agony of Helen's end, and how she might

still be living had it not been for that cruel order of exile from her home. It was memories like this that were to rankle in the hearts of two generations of gentle, peace-loving women and set their faces not so much against the government as against the instruments of the government. It was not the give-and-take fighting of Mead and Thomas and Rosecrans, nor the clean, hard hits of Grant that stirred to its depths the bitterness of the South; it was that serpent's trail that Sherman left across her pulsing heart.

"And all this has not conquered us," said Cicely. "To conquer a people, you must vanquish its arms, not persecute its women."

The old major looked at her admiringly: "You are right. But I think the end is near — we are not conquered in spirit, but overcome in body, failing for lack of men and munitions of war. The news from Lee is very discouraging — he cannot hold Richmond much longer, and the fall of Richmond will be the fall of the Confederacy."

"Are the people returning to Atlanta?" asked Mrs. Clinch, wondering as to the condition of her own home there.

"I think many of them have returned; though, of course, I did not go that far up-country, and cannot say how they found the city."

"And what of Hardee and Savannah?"

"The city must fall — it is inevitable. Sherman

has sixty thousand regulars; Hardee's command numbers less than fifteen thousand, many of them being but boys from school, tottering convalescents from the hospitals, and inexperienced militia. Now that Fort McAllister has been taken, the fate of Savannah is sealed. We have fought our fight and we have failed; the four years of strife and hardship have been in vain."

The thought was a harassing one, and the major fell into a moody silence, his face half hidden by his hand as he leaned on the table. Presently he looked up to find the two older women engaged in conversation about the baby in Mrs. Clinch's lap, and rising he followed Cicely to the desk at the end of the library.

"You have something for me to send to your father?" he asked. "I will do my best to get it into Savannah."

"I was going to ask you," and she held out a letter. "I need his counsel, for I am in much perplexity as to how I am to care for this large family until the fall harvests — if, indeed, we raise any crops this year."

"It is a grave responsibility for one so young. I wish I might help you."

"I am sure you would were it in your power."

"I do not think, however, you need look so far ahead for your guests; the war will be over before

the summer comes, and they will be returning to their homes."

"Many of them no longer have homes to go to. This one was spared as by a miracle."

The words suggested the wounded officer for whom he had made his purposely fruitless search on his former visit, and with his elbow on the top of the secretary, he looked down at her seated before it.

"And the rose-room is really vacant?"

The twinkle in his eyes must have been contagious, for her own sparkled in answer: "Really and truly vacant."

"When did your bird fly?"

"A few hours after your own departure."

"I thought of him as too ill to travel. If we catch him between here and Savannah shall we return him to your custody?"

"A jailer should always be glad to recover an escaped charge."

"And I warrant he'd be glad enough to be returned, for if he has any appreciation in him he is still your captive — in heart and fancy. Oh, you need not shake your head; I know whereof I speak — from experience."

"You have a quick imagination, Major Bailey."

"No; rather a keen appreciation. No man of good warm blood — and from your description I

take it this Fairlee was that kind — could be nursed by you and not feel his heart stir.”

“It was his pulse, not his heart. We were merely patient and nurse.”

“The most dangerous relation a man may sustain to a charming woman, its contact is so close. Fairlee left his heart behind him, I’ll wager my sword on that — having seen you myself and felt the spell of your smile. Why, old man as I am, Cicely Houston, I myself have dreamed of you as I rode through the dark of these two past nights — a foolish, useless dream with the details of which I shall not trouble you. But if I were five and twenty instead of five and fifty, when this fighting was done I’d come riding back to your door in search of something very different from Yankee camp trailers.”

The gallantry of his tone roused her dormant coquetry, and the glance she shot at him made his old blood tingle: “And if you were five and twenty, perhaps you would find what you sought.”

“Don’t make me regret my age more keenly! For I am in absolute earnest,” and his eyes filled with a quiet sadness.

“You are deceiving yourself.”

“No. With your beauty and courage the other night you set my heart on a new trail; a trail which, for a younger man, might lead to happiness.” He leaned more heavily on the desk, then suddenly

smiled down at her: "But for all your sweetness and your haunting eyes, I shall not come back when peace is declared; for I know how many birthdays we have each of us counted, and I am no fool, my pretty Cicely. An old man may have his idle dream, but he knows there is no awakening to its realization."

"Age has certainly not dulled your gallantry. I believe I almost wish you were only five and twenty. But will you come out and see the window from which my prisoner made his escape?"

"Yes. I would like to see the means a man took to run away from you."

In the meantime, in the bay window in the hall, half hidden by the curtains, another love drama was being enacted, and age held no place in the cast.

"That is absurd, Sergeant McHenry," Minna was laughingly protesting; "you have known me only forty-eight hours."

"And isn't that long enough for a man to make up his mind, if he wastes none of the time thinking of other things? Does acquaintance have to be in its senility before it puts forth the flowers of love?"

"Not exactly in its senility, but older than two days and nights."

"Not with an Irishman, mavourneen. We are as quick of heart as people say we are of wit."

"But your very quickness may lead you into mistakes as to your true preferences."

"In matters of money and business, yes; but there are three things on which an Irishman's judgment never fails him — the pipe he smokes, the glass he drinks, and the girl he loves."

"It must be very satisfactory to have such implicit confidence in your judgment," she teased.

"It is," he assured her, with grave lips, though his blue eyes went a-winking. "It is absolutely the most comfortable thing imaginable to know that you are the one girl in the world for me, that there cannot possibly be any one else."

"How did this overwhelming conviction come to you?" she asked, stealing a glance at him from under her tantalizing lashes.

"Like a minie-ball straight at my heart, the first time you looked at me. I wanted then and there to grab you and — and kiss you."

"Don't you think that was a — well, rather an informal way to think of a lady the first time you saw her?"

"I don't give a penny for formality; it is reality I want. Won't you love me just a little?"

"Really, Sergeant McHenry, you must leave me more of the window seat; you are not entitled to more than two thirds! Go back to the other end."

"But I cannot reach your hand from the other end, and — dear me, what a pretty little hand it is!"

She snatched it from his grasp: "You will find directly that it is big enough to box a man's ears."

He caught it again, scrutinizing it with mock alarm: "Dear me, how threatening it looks! If Sherman had known there was a fist like that in Georgia he would never have dared to cross the state line," and the next moment his lips were on the rosy finger tips.

"Since that is the way you are going to behave, I will go back to the library," and she sprang up and would have drawn the curtain, but he barred her way with such pretty apologies and explanations and protestations of exemplary behaviour that presently she was appeased, and sat down again. For a few minutes he talked decorously of the search the squad had made for deserters and camp-followers, telling her of the desolation they had found; but other thoughts were too insistent for him to keep this up, and soon he found himself back on the ever-absorbing subject of love.

"I was furious with the major when he took you by the chin in that familiar way in the upper hall the other night. I told him afterward I wished it had been the other girl he kissed, and he said ——"

"What did he say?"

"He said he wished so too."

"The horrid, unchivalrous creature!" flashed Minna indignantly. "After kissing me to wish it had been the other girl! I just hate him!"

"It was beastly; though he is a regular brick otherwise. But he was awfully taken with Miss

Houston; said she was the bravest girl he ever saw."

"And she is," cried Minna loyally; and as proof of her assertion would have told him how Cicely had saved the wounded officer, only she feared some harm might even yet come to her cousin because of it. Besides, it was more entertaining to listen to McHenry's love-making.

"That's all right," he was saying, "but it never seemed to me necessary for a woman to be brave; men can do their fighting. I want the girl I love to be such a coward that she will run to my arms every time it so much as thunders."

"Oh, but Cicely is afraid of thunder."

"And not afraid to brave the old major! But come, don't let us talk of Cousin Cicely any more. The major will soon be calling, and I have a hundred things to tell you. I want you to marry me, mavourneen; say I may come back after the war with a preacher and the license."

"After the war, with a preacher," she slowly repeated, tantalizingly meditative. "Somehow that has a very familiar sound."

"Then other men have been talking love and marriage to you?" he said jealously.

She sat up straight, her chin tilted resentfully. "Well, you certainly do not suppose that you are the first, do you?"

"No," he answered ruefully, "since I cannot hope

that all the other men who have come this way were blind; though heaven knows that so far as seeing you, I wish they had been! But I'm to be the last one to say such things to you, do you understand? If I catch any other man at it, I'll send a streak of daylight through him!"

"Bru-ru-ru!" she cried, blowing out her lips in make-believe terror. "How bloodthirsty you are. If Sherman had known there was such a fiery fighter in Georgia he would never have dared to cross the state line!"

He recognized his own tone of a minute before. "You little tease! But say I may come back as soon as the war is over."

"Oh, I suppose Cicely will make you welcome — I shall be gone."

"Gone?"

"Certainly, back home to Savannah with my father."

He fell back against the seat: "Zounds! but you nearly gave me heart-failure with fright; I thought you meant gone with another suitor."

"That too, perhaps; it all depends ——"

"On what, colleen?"

Her eyes were slits of mischievous amber light between the gold-tipped lashes, and her scarlet lips had a most seductive curve: "On — the other suitor."

"But there is to be no other; I am the last, and

I'll make you so much love that you'll never miss the others. Promise me not to listen ——"

"It would not be of the smallest use; a girl never feels it incumbent upon her to keep a promise not to listen to another man's pretty speeches."

"You are the most cruelly provoking and the most beautiful ——"

From beyond the curtains Major Bailey's voice was heard saying: "Tell McHenry to make ready for the start."

The sergeant stood up with soldierly promptness. "That sounds like an order of exile from Paradise," he whispered. "Remember, I shall come for you as soon as peace is declared."

"But I have not agreed to go with you," she laughed saucily, her face turned up to his tantalizingly.

"Then I shall carry you off by force, for have you I will; you have set my heart on fire."

He bent toward her in the soft light of the alcove, his alert blue eyes watching for his chance. But she guessed his purpose and was on her guard, and the next moment there was the sound of a light blow as of flesh upon flesh; for if his amorous lips had missed their aim at her cheek, her little boxing hand had not; and when the sergeant stepped out into the hall he was ruefully rubbing the side of his face.

"Did you say I was to send young Fairlee back

to you if we catch him, or carry him to a stricter jailer?" Major Bailey was asking of Cicely in the doorway. "I think we may come up with him somewhere to the south, and this time we will not overlook him."

In spite of the little scene in the alcove McHenry drew Minna down the step with him, and she said her last farewell at his stirrup out beside the horse-block. Slowly she reëntered the house after watching the cavalcade pass out of the gate at the end of the avenue of pines and break into a swift canter up the big road. She found Cicely before the hall fireplace, gazing abstractedly into the flickering flames. With a sudden frightened gravity Minna slipped an arm about her.

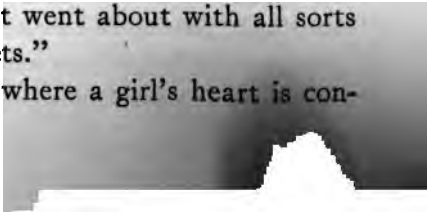
"I never thought of a war bullet for Joe Howell, but — Cicely, suppose — suppose Sergeant McHenry should be shot."

Cicely looked down into the pretty face, twitching with a hitherto unknown dread. Involuntarily she stroked back the bright hair with a lingering touch.

"And so our little butterfly is really trapped at last!"

"Trapped? nonsense! But what a word. One would think the sergeant went about with all sorts of deadly snares and nets."

"One sort is enough where a girl's heart is concerned."



“Oh, of course you ought to know, having been netted yourself. But that dreadful bullet. Cicely, did you ever happen to think that perhaps — just perhaps — Ray might be shot in this war — shot to death?”

With a swift, shuddering movement Cicely pushed the girl from her: “For God’s sake, Minna, hush — hush!”

CHAPTER XVI

TWO LETTERS

Love held the pen for one,
And one was duty's call — Ballad

A PART from the physical comfort of sunshine, Christmas day brought no brightness to the hearts at Pinehurst. The children were desolate because they had been told that no reindeer could run the blockade, and therefore Santa Claus would not visit them this year; and the hearts of the grown people were heavier still with the rumour that Hardee had evacuated Savannah, and that up in Virginia Lee was fighting his last battle around Petersburg and Richmond. Defeat, with all its attendant horrors of poverty and new and strange labour and domestic conditions, stared them in the face, so that the day that should have been joyous was full of a contrasting sadness. Somehow the little efforts at gayety seemed ghastly, like laughing at a funeral; and everybody was glad when at last the day was done and Grandma Houston had dismissed them after prayers. Each one

wanted to go to sleep and forget, for a time at least.

But Cicely had not been asleep when that grating sound first came at her window, and drowsily she wondered if it were rain or hail; then knew it was neither, remembering the belt of moonlight that lay across the carpet, and she sat up, listening. Again something rattled upon the pane, and rising softly that she might not disturb Lena, she crossed the floor and peeped out between the curtains. A man stood half in the shadow below, and that which struck her sash was a handful of gravel which he threw upward.

Her heart gave a great leap. Was it, perhaps, her father on a furlough to gladden her heart and help her with his love and counsel; or had Fairlee failed to reach Savannah and returned to her for shelter? More than a week had gone by since the ivy under the window of the rose-room had opened the way to his escape, and no word had come back to her. Not that she had expected it, for communication was difficult in these troubled times; but she had often looked away to the south-east and wondered how close Major Bailey had come to his quarry; and said over, almost unconsciously, the prayer with which they had parted: "God keep you, wherever you are." One more man would add but little to the enemy's strength or the jeopardy of her country—and he had befriended her in need.

The man below her window was unrecognizable in the dim light and, wrapping the curtain about her, she pushed up the sash:

"Who is it?"

The figure stepped out into the moonlight, and a negro's voice answered: "It's me, missy; Big Ben. I done come home frum S'vannah an' fotch you sumpen."

From Savannah? Then the journey had been accomplished in safety, but it was not of her father she was to hear.

"Call Jake to open the door; I will be down in a moment."

Lena had waked and was at her side, and presently the two stole softly down the stair, the light of their candle making fitful and illusive shadows in the dark, deserted hall. Jake was already at the side door, and it was but a moment's delay to take down the bar and turn the key. Ben's black face greeted them, radiant with self-satisfaction and surety of welcome.

"Dere's so many soljers erbout I was skeered ter come in fo' dark," he said by way of explanation; "caise de cap'un, he pintedly tole me not ter let nobody ketch me, an' our fo'ks is jes as horngry as de Yankees dese days."

"Captain Fairlee sent you back?"

"Yes'm, missy."

"He reached Savannah safely?"

"Dat he did, missy; tuk us jes two days an'er little mo'rn a haf, startin' fo' day an' ridin' late. I knowed I'd git 'im dar fer you, or I wouldn't er tried. I rested er day an' night fo' I started home."

"Why did you come back — why did he send you?"

He looked at her in simple surprise: "Ter fotch de horses. Ain de cap'un done tole you I was ter come back wid 'um?"

Jake's eyes gleamed; "You got de horse an' dat little mule out dar?"

"I sho is; an' dars sumpen on de mule fer ole miss; dat's why I was skeered ter come outen de lo' groun's fo' sunset. I didn't want no soljers er no kine ter git dem beastes an' dem bundles an' Gen'ul Wheeler's men done plum tuk de country."

Jake stepped out into the yard and Ben, following, led the animals from the shadow of the house. On the beautiful, high-spirited mare — Fairlee's own riding horse — was only a saddle, but a pack was fastened on the mule.

"It's coffy an' loaf sugar fer ole miss," announced Ben, "an' here's er letter fer her, too. De cap'un say I was ter show de writin' on dis side ter any er Gen'ul Wheeler's men I met, an' maybe dey'd lemme pass 'cause dey'd know ole miss. I rid de horse an' led Jinny. I thought she gwine be cantankerous, but she come erlong pretty peart."

By this time Jake had unstrapped the pack and

brought it into the hall, and Ben expressed his satisfaction at seeing it safe. He was as a child who had accomplished a task and was full of pleasure over the result. No thought of wrongdoing occurred to him. The whole matter had been an enjoyable episode.

"An' now, missy, I's got er piece er writin' fer you, but you'll ha' ter git your scissors, 'cause de cap'un done sewed it in mah coat," he grinned.

While the scissors were snipping at the threads of his coat he talked volubly of the journey to Savannah. Carefully they had avoided the known roads and held to the swamps and forests, feeding the horses on the gleanings Sherman had left in the fields, and buying with the scant coin left in Fairlee's purse their own food at the doors of cabins and huts. Once they had nearly run into a party of Confederate scouts, but the friendly dusk had aided their escape. That night it was close upon twelve o'clock before they had stopped again to rest, and they went to sleep supperless.

When the scissors had done their work and Ben had been fed from the pantry shelves, the two girls dismissed the negroes to put up the tired animals, and after the door was bolted they went up the stair, the shadows behind them dodging and careening like will-o'-the-wisps as the candle moved. In their own room Lena went immediately to bed again, but Cicely, raking together the charred

brands in the fireplace, blew them to a flame, and, with the candle beside her, sat down on the rug to read her letter. The leaping flames warmed the crimson wrapper she wore to a glorious glow; and her cheeks caught the reflection until they were as twin roses. Any man who loved her would have joyed in this revelation of her beauty. When the wafer on the letter was broken she shaded her eyes with her curved hand, and read:

SAVANNAH, Dec. 21, '64.

Again we must choose in our own thoughts the salutation I give you. I cannot bring myself to be merely polite; therefore you know what I would say if I dared. Well, at least I am free to think sweet words of you until the other man has married you. Then — but why anticipate my pain?

Having nursed me so carefully, you will wish first to know how much of your work I have undone in my escape and journey. My shoulder has troubled me, for I strained it coming down the treacherous ladder the ivy made from the rose-room window. Once the vine pulled away from the wall, and for a minute I thought that in the morning you would find me on the ground with a broken limb, and somehow I never doubted but that you would carry me back to the rose-room and nurse me well again. However, the strain is healing, and the company surgeon assures me I will soon be ready for active field service. He tells me that the nature of my wound was such that but for the skilful attention I received under your care I would be a dead man. So you see what great gratitude I owe you.

Ben's boast that he knew the swamps like a rabbit proved true. He made a model guide. Only once were we in any real danger. It was perhaps nine o'clock in the evening, and we had stopped to rest our horses in a field behind a clump of last year's rotting hayricks. Between us and the road was

also a hedge that gave us additional shelter. The first warning of danger we had was the clinking as of canteens against other metal substances, and then suddenly in the road we saw a crowd of moving objects that resolved themselves into a squad of mounted men. They stopped about a hundred yards up the road and, alighting, built a fire and ate their supper. I crawled as close as I dared, and through the hedge saw the men quite clearly. They were Confederates, and the officer in charge was no other than your cousin, Lieutenant Clinch. Yes, the man who stands between me and you. He was in the full glare of the camp fire, his arm thrown up over the pommel of his saddle, as he leaned against his horse, smiling, unconscious of danger. And I who long to be his rival, crouched not twenty paces away with my revolver in my hand! It was a situation with which a story writer might conjure. But you did not lose your lover, Cicely Houston. He rides to-day with his men somewhere through the Georgia country which you and he love so well. But if a twig had broken under me, or my horse had betrayed me with a whinny, one of us would have died there in the faint starlight; for a man must fight for his life.

The last day's journey was very hard, for we had come to the rice plantations and they were soggy, some of them flooded with water, and I was much exhausted. Yesterday, in the afternoon, we reached the first Federal picket post (how good the blue uniforms looked!) and to-day, rested and greatly refreshed, I entered Savannah with my company; for General Hardee evacuated it last night, marching out by the one road left open. It was a wise move, for what were his fifteen thousand men — and only a third of those regulars — compared to General Sherman's splendidly equipped and swarming corps? Of course it would have been an added victory for us to have captured this whole Confederate army, but I have no regrets, for the war is near its close, and, besides, your father was with Hardee.

For us the occupation of Savannah is not unlike that of Atlanta; only there are many more inhabitants and a far more beautiful city.

Cicely, there will be no Southern Confederacy, for your cause is already tottering to the end! I who believe in the Union, who have fought for it for nearly four years, rejoice in this with exceeding gladness; and yet I am also sorry for your sorrow. I am still a loyal Federal soldier, but since my stay among your people I understand more clearly their side of this dark question of dissolution.

I think of you constantly — but need I tell you that? Twenty times a day I touch the gray ribbon on my breast and whisper your name. I would give the world to know that you did not throw the other one away in anger, but that it is hidden somewhere near your dear heart. And yet I hardly dare to hope it. I suppose I shall never know how you feel toward me — whether you are angry that I took my fate in my own hands, or whether, down in your heart, you are not relieved and glad to be rid of the responsibility. But believe me, it is best for us both that I left your house, for I cannot bring myself to think you could have looked upon my inevitable capture and imprisonment without pain. My claim upon your pity, if not your love, would have precluded that.

Ben is taking back to you Bess, my favourite horse. Always, during the past weeks, I have wanted you to own her. Will you not ride her for my sake? I wish some reminder of me, something I have owned and cared for, to come into your daily life; then you cannot utterly forget me. You will shut the rose-room up again, I suppose; and with the closing of its door will be put away all association and reminder of me. If, however, you do go there sometimes, I think you will feel, subtly and instinctively, how my thoughts cling about the room and you.

In imagination I am holding your hands, taking my last farewell of your dark eyes that shine always in my soul, of your sweet, red lips that are not for my kisses. Good-by, good-by!

Yours in truth and love

ALLYN FAIRLEE.

The spluttering of the candle wick, low in the hot socket, at last aroused Cicely from the reverie into which she had fallen, and thrusting her hand into the bosom of the crimson wrapper she touched the ribbon pinned there, and smiled suddenly and softly, thinking of its mate. Then another thought came: Suppose Fairlee and Ray had fought there in the dusky starlight? Suppose—but with a deep, startled breath she blew the spluttering candle into darkness; and a few moments later when she crept to bed she was trembling so violently that Lena declared she must be perishing with the cold.

Grandma Houston's letter, read at the breakfast table the next morning, contained Fairlee's formal expression of thanks for the kindness he had experienced from herself and her family, together with such war tidings as he thought would be of interest to her. Tucked into the corner of the pack of sugar and coffee was a beautiful Christmas doll for Marie, not a "spy-doll" this time, and for Dick and Jimmy two such many-bladed knives as they had often admired in Fairlee's possession. So after all Santa Claus did come to Pinehurst that last sad Christmas of the war.

"I wish he had remembered to send me some guitar strings," pouted Minna. "He knew I had only one left; and now that is broken."

"Oh, Sergeant McHenry would much rather hear you talk than sing," laughed Cicely.

"Did he tell you so?"

"Spoken words are sometimes superfluous to convey a man's meaning."

"Yes, he *has* the most expressive eyes!" sighed Minna. "Doesn't it seem strange how I could ever have admired Joe Howell's brown ones so much?"

"Or Phil Tait's gray ones, or Ned Somers's black ones? Very, very strange!"

"Cicely, you are the worst tease! The trouble is you have been in love with one man so long you have grown narrow in your views."

"You think so?"

"Yes. Major Bailey is not very young, and I just hate him! but he *is* beautifully mannered, and he was so pleased with your courage and good looks that you would have had him abjectly at your feet if you had only blushed and giggled and rolled up your eyes a little."

"And why should I wish him at my feet?"

Minna fell limply back in her chair: "Shade of Mother Eve! of what clay is a woman made to ask a question like that?"

The company of women could not but rejoice at the prospect of a near end to the war, though their cause was going down in defeat. The strain of the long, lonely years when they waited and watched for their fighting menfolk was telling on them, and, since defeat seemed inevitable, it were

better it came before the insatiate Moloch of strife claimed any more victims.

But although Hardee had evacuated Savannah and Sherman held the city there was still sharp skirmishing along the picket lines and between the scouting parties; and one day, some two weeks after Ben's return, a courier on his way up-country left a letter for Cicely at the Pinehurst gate, saying he would stop for an answer the following morning. The letter was from Joe Howell, who wrote that her brother or Ray, he could not ascertain which, had been wounded while driving in a picket post, and was at the Piper farm, some forty miles to the south. How serious the wound was he was not prepared to say, having had the news second-hand; but he did know that the farmhouse was small and already uncomfortably crowded with people. He felt that Cicely should know as much as he was able to tell.

Ray or Guy wounded, perhaps needing attention to preserve life!

"Oh, I must go, I must go!" cried Cicely, looking up from the letter she had read to the group of startled women.

"And I, too," answered Mrs. Clinch. Then her eyes fell on the baby in her arms, of late so pale and ailing. Dared she trust it to any one else?

"I will go in your place, Cousin Maria," cried Minna, reading the struggle in the other's mind.

And Mrs. Clinch nodded slowly, her eyes filling with tears. After all, it might not be her boy.

But Cicely's glance had fallen on a white and twitching face at the edge of the group: "No," she decided quickly; "you can do more to help grandma and Cousin Maria here with the house-keeping. Lena is a better nurse than either of us, and she shall go with me."

But grandma and Aunt Hinton were vehement in their protests and objections. There was no escort, the journey would be perilous, improper for two young girls.

"We could go with the courier," whispered Lena, her hand gripping Cicely's.

"Why, of course — that is the very thing; Joe Howell says here the man is quite trustworthy," answered Cicely. "We are not likely to meet any Federal soldiers, and our own will not molest us. Now, Grandma Houston, you and Aunt Hinton must listen to reason. Somebody must go, and who is there but us two? Father would say we were right. Suppose Guy or Ray should die there for lack of nursing!"

And the matter was argued back and forth; but the wishes of the younger people finally prevailed, and the next morning found the two girls and Big Ben waiting at the gate when the courier came in sight. Ben was going in order to bring back word of the girls' safety and the invalid's condition to

the anxious hearts left behind. The long, level
lances of the rising sun lay over the deserted, wintry
fields as Bess, bearing the two girls, fell into step
beside the cavalry horse of the courier, and the
little one-eyed mule jogged on behind.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE COURIER'S SADDLE

A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,
And beneath, from the pebbles, in passing, a spark
Struck out by a steed flying fearless and fleet—

Longfellow

THE journey to the south was expedited by Ben's knowledge of short cuts, so that by noon the following day the two girls were beside the bed in the farmhouse — one of the few Kilpatrick's torch had spared. In a breathless passion of prayer Cicely entered the attic room.

It was Ray who was tossing there in delirium. The surgeon of the company had dressed the flesh wound in his arm and set the broken leg before leaving him, and Mrs. Piper had done all she could for the patient's comfort. But she had many family cares, and constant attention to his needs had been impossible, and the bandages had slipped with his restless moving. It was Lena who reset the broken bone and rebound it in its splints.

"I often helped father set a fracture even when I was a child; he always declared if I had been a boy I would have made a fine doctor," she said, "and during these past two years I have read his

medical books closely, feeling that some time the knowledge would be useful."

"If Ray ever has the use of his leg he will owe it to you," replied Cicely, wondering to see the sureness with which the usually shy Lena handled the maimed limb. The woman was sunk in the nurse, the slender fingers were without a tremor. That night Ray slept better, and the next day recognized his nurses.

"You?" he whispered, reaching for Cicely's hand, his eyes lighting with their old joy at seeing her. Kneeling beside him she laid her cheek against his, a great wave of thankfulness swelling in her heart.

"Yes, Lena and I have come to look after you and take you home if possible. Joe Howell wrote us. You will soon be well," she answered, and presently told him of the misplaced bandages and of Lena's skill. "She is as good as old Doctor Watson himself, so you can feel safe in her care."

He smiled gratefully at Lena, but his eyes went back to Cicely: "To see you is the best of medicine, but to get well — that is another thing." Then with her hand in his he dozed again. The kneeling girl noted with dimming eyes the heavy inroads the hard campaigns and recent suffering had made on him physically. What a curse this war had been in all ways, and how long-drawn-out the woful effects of it would be!



"Cicely," whispered Lena at her elbow, and there was something queer in her voice, something that sounded like accusation and resentment, "Cicely, you will not break his heart — you will not *dare?*"

"Lena!"

"I mean it. Sometimes I have thought that Captain Fairlee ——"

"Hush! Captain Fairlee could never be anything to me; I shall never even see him again. And you know mine and Ray's long attachment. I pledged myself years ago to help pay my father's debt to him, and never for one moment have I regretted that promise. I suppose I have always dimly known how things would end with us, for Ray and I have grown up loving each other."

But with one arm she drew the girl close to her, and after awhile, under pretext of weariness, she slipped her own hand from the invalid's and put Lena's in its stead; and she sat by the table a long time, studying, so Lena thought, the pattern of the home-made carpet at her feet, but seeing instead the tender heart over which she and Ray must pass on their road to a united destiny. Ah, here was a cruelty of fate as great as any of the merciless war!

She was aroused from her reverie by the sound of a horse's hoofs in rapid flight, and reached the window in time to see a Confederate soldier ride

into the yard below. When the horse stopped of its own will, for there was no hand on the rein, the man slipped from his saddle and dropped to the ground, his strength utterly spent; for on his shirt was a dark stain showing where a bullet had found lodgement.

"What is it?" whispered Lena.

And with a low quick word of explanation Cicely ran down stairs, calling to Mrs. Piper to follow and to one of the children to bring some water. The man was in a swoon when they reached him, but under their efforts at restoration he roused up sufficiently to beg them not to move him, it hurt so, and he knew he was dying.

"They — got me — at last; but — I brought away — my despatches."

The two women covered him from the wind and did all they could for his comfort, and by degrees he told them his story. He was a scout, he said, going to General Wheeler with important papers, but a band of Federals had chased him in and out of the swamps, and had finally given him this death wound. He had evaded them by a double turn, but they were following. Was there nobody who could carry his despatches forward? They were in his coat, and unless Major Bailey got them his little band, holding a perilous post, would be cut off, captured, or annihilated.

Major Bailey! Cicely dropped to her knees,

her ear close to the whispering lips. Guy was with Major Bailey, the courier had told her the day before; and had not the major himself befriended her on a never-to-be-forgotten night?

She held a few drops of the brandy she had brought from Ray's room to the fast stiffening lips. "Where is Major Bailey? How would a messenger go to reach him?"

Her own voice trembled with suppressed excitement. Slowly but minutely he gave her the directions, his breath coming in rattling gasps between the words. She listened intently; and when he had finished she thrust her hand into his coat and drew out the thin despatch papers. Some one should take them; one of Mrs. Piper's boys perhaps, or Ben. Yes, Ben should go, he knew the country so well. And the glazing eyes brightened a moment as she cried out that Major Bailey should have the message. Then there was a convulsive twitching of the body under the blanket, and in a few minutes she and Mrs. Piper were looking at each other over a corpse.

The older woman's thoughts were for the dead man — his sudden arrival and everlasting departure, and how she would get him buried; but Cicely's were for the papers in her hand. She looked at the oldest Piper boy, and turned away; he was only ten. Ben — where was Ben? Nobody knew; he often stayed in the woods for hours hunting

and trapping. She turned her eyes upward. Already the sun was far down past the meridian, and the dead scout had said Major Bailey must have the papers in time to move before midnight; and he had said, too, that the pursuing party was headed this way — the men who had shot him — they would be a double menace to the little band of gray-coats trying to hold that lone outpost. And her own brother was in that band. There was no time to wait for Ben; there was but one way, if she only dared.

And why should she not dare? It would take only a few hours for the journey, and Ray would be safe with Lena, his needs and comforts carefully looked after. He would even bid her go if he knew; she felt sure of that. All these long four years of war she had been dreaming an idle, futile dream of helping the Confederacy, longing for an opportunity; and the opportunity was here at hand. Her dress? A woman could not ride on this message in these perilous times. But were not Ray's clothes ready at hand, and were not she and he about the same height?

Shouting to the Piper boy to bring Bess from the stable, she flew up stairs, her feet seeming scarcely to touch the planks. Ray was sleeping. A few words explained her purpose to the astonished and tearful Lena; for a moment she dropped down beside the bed, her lips just brushing the brow of

the sleeper; and ten minutes later a slender figure, clad in breeches and coat of gray, sprang through the door into the yard where the boy was holding the mare. In a fever of impatience she tore the trooper's saddle from his jaded horse and threw it upon Bess. As she drew the girth there was a far away halloo upon the air, and a cloud of dust over the road by which the scout had come — a cloud of dust out of which came now and then a flash of steel, be it bridle-bit or sabre hilt. Already the pursuit was coming, was almost upon her; but she had gone too far to turn back now; flight was all that was left to her. She swung herself astride the mare, and, giving her the rein, sped away down the road that cut the level country like a scar. But the troopers behind had seen her, and soon the halloos grew louder, and cries of "Halt! halt!" came faintly to her on the rushing wind. But she only plied her whip and sped away the faster. A pistol shot cracked sharply behind her, and the bullet sang as it passed her ear. A great terror seized her, but she dug her heels into the mare's flanks and bowed forward in the saddle, holding the mare to the middle of the road. Another, and yet another, shot rang out and the song of the flying lead chilled her. But the mare had caught her panic, and the loosened rein was all the license she needed to widen the gap between her and her pursuers. Those behind saw for a

moment a man bending to the saddle pommel, and a horse that scudded away like the wind; then a turn in the road hid them, and only a faint trail of dust above the far underbrush told where they fled. Whips and spurs did their utmost, but the flying scout was not to be taken. For a mile the chase was kept up, then the pursuers straggled slowly back, for the quarry had eluded them like a wary fox. At the Piper house they found a worn-out horse cropping the grass in the yard, and a dead soldier covered from the glare of the sun and waiting for some one to dig his grave. While up stairs, beside another soldier who babbled incoherently, a girl, with the pure eyes and pale face of a Raphael saint, knelt in prayer.

Out on the road, clinging to pommel and tossing mane, Cicely saw nothing distinctly; the trees and shrubs and fences by the roadside seemed a stream of garry and green tones flowing forever to the rear, and the few cabins she passed were as flashes of white in the swift procession. Gradually her fear subsided and the excitement of the race took hold upon her, so that it was the Cicely with the fighting eyes who straightened herself in her saddle and began to plan definitely her course. She had travelled this road in her grandma's carriage twice before when going to visit in Savannah, so that it was not unfamiliar to her, and presently she turned out of the main thoroughfare and cut across country

by an obscure bridle path of which the dying scout had told her; and thus it was her would-be captors lost her.

All the late afternoon she rode, never sparing her horse, stopping now and then to ask an occasional wayfarer or a gleaner in the bare fields the right road that she might not miss her bearings. As the twilight came on her timidity returned, but her man's apparel and the pistols in her belt reassured her. She believed she would not hesitate to use the latter if necessity presented itself; but not unless her life or her despatches were in danger would she draw one of them from its leathern pocket. At a wayside spring she got down and watered and rested her horse and, by the last faint daylight, read the despatches carefully; thus if anything happened to them she could repeat their purport to those whose safety depended on the knowledge. Then she remounted and rode on again under the softly blossoming stars.

The road seemed desperately lonely. Not a sound broke the stillness, not a branch moved, not an owl hooted, not a nighthawk flapped by on its slow wing. She swayed forward, weary beyond expression; when suddenly from somewhere out of the darkness a voice cried:

"Halt! Give the password!"

Instantly she was erect, her heart beating tumultuously. Had she reached her destination? But

no; she had crossed no creek, and the scout had said that Major Bailey was just over the creek. Had she missed her way and fallen among the wrong soldiers? Quickly her hand felt for the pistol, but the shock of the cold stock sent a chill through her; and with the cowardice of irresolution she again betook herself to flight. Obediently the horse plunged into the darkness ahead, while she listened for a shot to follow her; but instead there came a halloo, answered by a mellower one from farther up the road in front of her. She could turn neither to the right nor to the left, for a ravine far too deep and wide to be leaped in the dark edged one side of the road and a thick hedge the other. Beyond the hedge there suddenly sprang to view a cluster of twinkling lights. Turning her startled eyes from them she saw dimly before her a man with a levelled gun, and his order to draw rein in the name of the United States, together with the approach of rapid footsteps from the rear, left her no alternative but to obey; and in another minute her pistols were taken from her, and she was a prisoner in the hands of the enemy.

Between her captors the girl passed through a gap in the hedge, and was turned sharply toward the cluster of lights which she now knew to be the camp fires of a company of soldiers bivouacking for the night. She refused to give any name when she had dismounted beside one of these fires, but

one of the men, holding a flaming brand aloft for a sight of her face, exclaimed: "He looks like that Clinch fellow we wounded at the Piper place the other day."

"Yes; and here is the name 'Clinch' on the pistol stock."

Cicely drew a breath of relief; they had not guessed her sex; but the next moment her lips were white and shaking with a revulsion of emotion, for an orderly arrived to say that Captain Fairlee wished the prisoner brought immediately into his presence. Captain Fairlee! This, then, was his company, and she was to be his captive, she was to go before him—thus! By a great effort she held herself erect and, with an indifference she was far from feeling, followed her guide across the field to a tent, in front of which was a table improvised of a piece of plank and two blocks of wood. A pine torch, stuck in a knothole in the plank, threw a flaring light over the two men—Fairlee and another officer—who sat together going over some papers. Cicely stopped as far in the shadow as possible.

"Here is the man, sir," said the orderly, saluting; "he refused to give his name, but one of the men recognized him as a Lieutenant Clinch."

Fairlee sprang to his feet: "Lieutenant Clinch ——" then, as if remembering his duty and the other men who watched him, he asked the orderly coldly if the prisoner had been searched.

"No; only his weapons have been taken from him."

Fairlee was peering into the shadow toward the captive: "Young man, you will yield up to my orderly all despatches and papers you have about you."

"I have nothing that is your property," Cicely spoke gruffly, trying to disguise her voice.

"Search him, sergeant," was Fairlee's terse order.

For a moment Cicely was inclined to submit in order to promote the deception she was practising; but as the man's hands reached for her pockets her womanhood was up in arms.

"Don't you dare touch me!" she cried, stepping backward out of his reach; but he followed her, and in another moment she was struggling to throw off his grasp from her arm, calling out to him to have a care. With a quick exclamation Fairlee leaped up and took a step toward them; then again checked himself, and his voice broke sharply into the *mêlée*.

"Let him go, sergeant; I will examine him myself at my leisure. Take him to the barn yonder and leave a guard at the door. He seems faint with fatigue; see that he has some refreshment. I shall have finished here in half an hour."

Breathing hard, Cicely crushed her cap farther over her face, and, with a bare salute to the speaker,

followed the sergeant to a small building dimly seen in the field beyond the tents. It was an empty rice crib, built high from the ground on rude pillars that during the wet season the contents might remain dry. A door and one narrow window were the only openings, dust and cobwebs and a rude bench its only furnishings. An excellent prison, for it was tight and strong. Cicely took her bearings hastily by the light of the sergeant's lantern before he withdrew, but the chance for escape was hopeless; then in the darkness she threw herself on the bench and thrust her hand into her pocket, for her first thought was of her despatches. There were but two, a long one of a general nature concerning Sherman's probable move out of Savannah, and a much shorter one telling where Major Bailey would find a small body of Confederate cavalry who would join him in an attack on a certain outlying Federal post. She rightly judged that the first would be no news or of no possible use to these men, who would know the movements of their own forces; it was the second paper they would gloat over, for it would not only leave Major Bailey's little band at their mercy, but would also uncover the position of that second body of cavalrymen and give them up to the enemy. Thankful for having had the foresight to read the despatches, she deftly separated them, and returning the longer one to her breast pocket, she tore the other into

bits and crushing it into her mouth slowly chewed it to a pulp; then spat it out into the dust. It was not necessary to destroy both; she wanted one as an excuse and reason for her present plight. She was cold to the very finger tips when she thought of the interpretation Fairlee might put upon her presence in his camp if he guessed her identity, and she should have no visible evidence of her real purpose.

Presently the orderly returned with water and such fare as soldiers have, and she was glad to break her long fast. There was a bit of silver in her trousers pocket, and she gave it to the man, begging that her horse also might be fed. And the rough fellow went away, wondering how a man could have so soft a voice and such a gentle manner. He left his lantern, and its shine made a circle of moon-like whiteness on the floor; but beyond that circle the shadows were not dissipated, so that as Cicely sat pondering her perilous position, her features could scarcely be discerned. She was glad of the dimness, for, even more insistent than the danger that stared her in the face, was the thought that Fairlee would surely recognize her, that it would be impossible for her to conceal her identity when he came to demand her despatches. What was to become of her? Would he send her to prison; and if he did, how could she live there with only men for her companions? And

then she tried desperately to puzzle out how it was she had missed her way and blundered into the lines of the enemy. How madly foolish she had been not to realize from the first that she had no chance of success. How reasonable now seemed Lena's tears and entreaties and how far away and safe was that room where the pale girl was kneeling beside the invalid! Tired and unstrung, all the soft side of Cicely's womanhood stirred at the contrast between that scene and this one in which she was sharing, and the one thing she longed to do was to cry. But the next minute she was ashamed of her weakness. Had she not at least tried to help on her cause? If she had failed, it was not her fault. She would always have hated herself if she had refused the opportunity. And somehow she felt that Ray, too, would have hated her.

The strain of waiting became unbearable. Would Fairlee never come that she might be done with this scene, that her fate might be decided? She arose and walked to and fro along the rough boards of the floor, listening for any outside sounds, longing passionately for the oppressive silence to be broken.

And as she walked she thrust her hand into her breast pocket to make sure of her despatch, and under the thin paper her sensitive fingers felt something else that made a wrinkle through the pocket lining — a knot of ribbon. She stopped

suddenly, thrilling a little with the escape it suggested. Fairlee would never turn down that appeal. Should she summon the guard and send it to him? No, she would not be under any further obligation to him; she owed him her house, that must be all. Besides, it would be playing the coward to let him risk himself to save her; and she was not that kind of coward, even if she did want to cry like a baby here in the loneliness and darkness. She drew her hand sharply from the pocket and buttoned her coat as though barring peremptorily the exit of the gray ribbon.

Then suddenly she stood at acute attention, her cheeks paling, her bosom heaving; for there was a step at the door and the slow grating of the rusty hinges.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ESCAPE IN THE DARK

And into the midnight we galloped abreast — Browning

CAPTAIN FAIRLEE closed the door behind him and, stooping, lifted the lantern until its level rays fell upon the figure beside the bench. For a long minute they gazed into each other's eyes — she trying to gauge how much of knowledge or suspicion he had of her. Then he hung the light on a peg in the door-facing and came slowly toward her.

"I must ask that you give up to me any papers you have that may be detrimental to the United States government or the safety of any of its troops."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will not refuse, for you will not force me to search you — and an officer's duty in a case like this is plain."

She almost hated him for the suspicion that lurked in his words; but there was no other course open to her. She drew out the note and held it to him. He took it and glanced hastily at the contents by means of the lantern light.

"Is this all you have?"

"Every written line, I swear it." She lifted her hand solemnly, and he bowed his acceptance of her assertion. Then his eyes kindled with anger.

"And was it for this you played this desperate game — Cicely?"

Cicely! A hot flush flamed in her cheeks and she sank again upon the bench, painfully aware of her masculine attire. Then her chin went up.

"Yes, it is I; our relations are reversed — it is I who am now your prisoner; though I hoped you would not recognize me."

"Did you think you could deceive me? I suspected you at the first glance; but from the moment I bade the sergeant search you I was sure. Come, tell me how it is you are on this business—in this guise?"

Instinctively she drew her feet farther under the bench to hide them, wishing he had not hung the lantern just in front of her.

"Do you realize none of the self-control it required for me not to speak your name out there before those men when the realization of your identity came to me? And how was it you yourself betrayed no surprise at the meeting?"

"I heard from the orderly that I was to be taken before you."

He came a little nearer to her: "God in heaven, Cicely, the mad hope that came to me as

I recognized you! The hope that after all you care ——”

All over her body she felt the hot, shamed blood tingling: “You should have known me better than to have had such a thought; it was as unworthy of you as of me. I was seeking a Confederate outpost; you were the last person I wanted to meet.”

He lifted his cap: “I understand, and I beg your pardon. The idea was but momentary. But now tell me how it is you are on this dangerous mission? I thought you safe at Pinehurst.”

And with an effort at calmness she gave him an account of her journey to the Piper farm, and how it was she came to be in her present position, never revealing, however, the existence and destruction of that other despatch, or hinting at Major Bailey’s proximity.

“I thought I would come upon some squad of Confederates who would carry the news of this paper to General Wheeler,” she answered evasively when he pressed her.

“You risked your life for a matter of very small importance,” he said with bitter regret, guessing at her peril from the pursuing party, “for General Wheeler will surely know when General Sherman begins to evacuate Savannah. You do not suppose that your people have only this one spy to watch us, do you?”

"I am not a soldier, therefore I know very little of the tactics of armies. It seemed important that this paper should reach its destination. The dying scout said so."

"And you never thought of the danger to yourself?" His eyes lit with admiration.

"Should one woman's fear weigh against the cause of her country?"

For the first time he touched her, taking her hand between both of his: "That sounds like the days at Pinehurst. It is women like you that make a country worth fighting for." Then forgetting momentarily the business in hand he asked eagerly, "You had my letter?"

"Yes."

"Ben would have brought an answer."

She moved sharply under the implied reproach. "There was nothing to write you, unless it was to express my appreciation for the beautiful gift of Bess, and you would guess that."

"Nothing else? Then my cause with you is indeed hopeless. I thought at least you might upbraid me for breaking jail."

"Grandma Houston thought it the best solution of the situation."

"And you ——" But he stopped, attracted by some sound without. She too was listening.

"I must go now," he said hastily, "though I have a hundred things to say to you; but I must not arouse

suspicion among the soldiers. I will have some blankets brought and you must make out the best you can for to-night. To-morrow I will contrive some way for you to escape. You need have no uneasiness now; my tent is not ten yards from this door; and I shall not sleep to-night, knowing whom I guard. And now ——”

But the guard was knocking at the door. He went out and Cicely was left alone with the weaving shadows, and her mind was torn by a dozen conflicting thoughts. It was perhaps ten minutes before Fairlee returned, and in his face was the gravity of a disturbing thought.

“A new and an unexpected difficulty has arisen. An aide from headquarters was here when you were captured and carried the news back with him, and now there comes in hot haste a message that you are to be sent before General Kilpatrick in the morning.”

She went as deadly pale as marble: “Kilpatrick! It had better have been Sherman himself. What will be my fate?”

“I dare not think what it might be if you went as you are.”

“If I went as I am? How, then, will you manage ——” She was looking down at her man’s clothes.

“I mean you are not to go at all, not to leave my protection,” he said fiercely. She stared at him,

not understanding: "I mean that I must arrange for you to escape to-night; the morning must not find you here."

"How?"

"I have no plan as yet, but listen well toward midnight, and when you hear three taps upon the window there, open it as quietly as possible. Now, I must go or suspicion will be aroused. It is ten o'clock, the camp is getting to bed, and lights will soon be out; by that time I shall have made arrangements."

He longed to take her hand, to say some gentle, comforting thing in this hour of her sore uncertainty and peril; but the door had jarred slightly open, and outside was the guard; so he went out with only a careless nod, but with a glance that said a hundred tender things.

Alone again in the dark room, Cicely stretched herself on the hard bench, with the blanket the guard had brought wrapped about her, for the night was chilly. Directly above her was the window, closed with its batten shutter which she had observed was fastened on this side with a hook and staple. But racked and weary as she was, the thought of Kilpatrick drove every vestige of sleep from her eyes and filled her with terror. What was Fairlee's plan? and if it failed, what would be her fate? She knew enough of the laws of war to realize something of the peril in which she stood.

She had played, or tried to play, the part of a spy, and men shot a spy; it was the law of war. Nay, worse than that, the shadow of the gallows lay at her feet; and worse even than the gallows was the thought of Kilpatrick! She shuddered in the blanket and hid her face. But presently, like some quieting tonic to her nerves, came the thought of Fairlee's promise, and a conviction that in some way he would keep it, he would save her. And then suddenly in the darkness she stretched out her arms toward that far-off room where Ray was sleeping.

"Oh, Ray, Ray, why couldn't it have been you to save me?" And then at last the tears came.

But the weeping was soon over and she lay quiet, thinking of each member of her family, particularly of Ray and her father, and what it would mean to them if Fairlee did not compass her escape and she went, instead, to prison or to death.

Then softly and suddenly at the window above her the summons came — one, two, three taps that might have been made by a bird, so light they were. But she was sensitively alive to sounds, and caught each stroke, counting them breathlessly. It was his signal; he had some plan and was come for her; and she was standing on the bench in a moment, feeling for the hook. It yielded to her pressure, and the shutter opened.

"Come," whispered Fairlee's voice. "Be quiet

and quick. Climb out cautiously; I will help you."

The moon had set, but the faint starlight revealed him on horseback under the window. Sitting thus, he could just reach up to the ledge, for the window was high because of the pillars under the crib. He dropped the rein on the horse's neck and sat with uplifted arms to receive her. She hesitated, but his authoritative whisper forestalled any objection. It was this way or not at all, and there was not a moment to spare. Carefully she climbed on to the narrow ledge and let herself down. He received her in his arms and allowed her to slip until her foot caught and rested in the stirrup he had shaken free for her. Her lithe body swayed against him, her heart beat over his heart, his lips grazed her cheek in the throbbing dark. It would have been beyond human strength not to have held her thus a moment longer than was necessary, his arms had yearned, his lips had thirsted for her so long!

"Cicely — sweetheart!"

But she let go her hold on his shoulder and would have leaped angrily to the ground.

"I beg your pardon," he said humbly. "I will not offend you again"; and then directed her how to swing to his arm and draw herself up behind him. She was agile and accustomed to horses, and unincumbered by skirts, and the thing was done in a

moment. Then they moved off cautiously in the shadow of the hedge and parallel with the road. Not a word was spoken; almost the girl ceased to breathe, so tense were her nerves. Once they stood in a hollow of darkness, made by drooping boughs, to let a sentinel pass down on his beat; and then they crept onward to a clump of trees and underbrush. Here a man was waiting with another horse. There were a few whispered words between him and Fairlee, and then the latter said over his shoulder:

"That is your horse; put your foot in the stirrup and you can pass over to the saddle. Steady, Bess, steady." Then his voice dropped to her ear: "Remember you ride as a man — the sentinels, if they see us, must take you for my orderly."

For answer Cicely reached for Bess's mane and swung herself lightly into the trooper's saddle; and in a moment they were moving silently and in single file through the sombre shadows of the hedge. Once a sentinel challenged them, but Fairlee gave the password, and they were not detained. It was perhaps twenty minutes before they came out on the road, far beyond where the last picket was posted. As Fairlee drew rein to let Cicely come up beside him, she was glad of the friendly half light, for she rode her horse as he did, and the colour would come into her cheeks. She

had asked no questions as to their plans, trusting him wholly.

"This road passes the Piper farm," he said, and she broke in quickly:

"Then I can easily follow it. You have been good, very good! When I think of Kilpatrick — oh, I can *never* thank you!"

"You need not say good-by until the parting comes," he laughed softly. "You are still my prisoner; I have not yet released you from custody."

"But you must not go any farther; it might not be safe for you, and I — I am not afraid."

"That sounds very courageous," he teased, noticing her hesitancy.

"How far is it to the Piper place?"

"I should say it was some eight or nine miles. You travelled farther than that this afternoon, for you took the other road, and you lost your way."

"Eight or nine miles; Bess can carry me there by two o'clock."

"And I can return by four."

"But it will be light at four, and all your camp will see you and guess. I cannot let you run this risk for me."

"My horse is a good one, and the man who brought Bess to the hedge knows my plan and would sell his life for me; so I feel no apprehension."

He knew well the delicate danger of his position, but to ride thus alone with her through the starlit

night was well worth the risk. He touched up the horses and they broke into a canter. But presently, as the animals slackened speed in a sandy stretch, he leaned toward her.

"Before going to the rice crib to-night I waited in my tent, hoping you would send me something."

"What?"

"The match to what I wear pinned here," and he touched his coat just over his heart.

"The gray ribbon?"

"Yes. Did you — did you not have it with you?"

"If I had sent it, could you have done more for me than you have already done?"

"Perhaps not; but it would have been infinitely sweeter to have acted in answer to your summons."

"There would have been a certain amount of compulsion in that. I like a voluntary service."

He peered through the semi-darkness, trying to read her face: "Do you mean that you had the ribbon and would not send it?"

"Do you think so poorly of me as to imagine I would have made a demand on you the answer to which would have jeopardized your safety, perhaps your life?"

He caught her whip-hand a moment in a warm grasp and his voice was boyishly eager: "But you wear the ribbon — you do not deny that!"

"Perhaps I put it on that I might always have it ready to answer a call from you. Major Bailey

and his squad came back to Pinehurst on their way south hunting you."

He laughed. "I do not like your explanation; I prefer to fashion a tenderer one for myself."

"As you please; but remember, I am not responsible for its accuracy."

They had struck a bit of hard road, and the horses moved at such a pace as to make conversation difficult. But Fairlee knew the value of time and let them hold their gait. A mile on they were walking again, for here the road skirted the swamp and was inundated by a recent rain. She told him of the family at Pinehurst, and more particularly of the morning she found he had disappeared, for he was full of quick questions. Major Bailey's second visit particularly interested him.

"We would like above all things to capture the sly old fox, for he gives us much trouble. I had a try at him myself yesterday, and but for an accident would have captured his whole band. I was just back from the expedition when you were captured."

"Was any one hurt?" she asked quickly.

"No; he evidently had been warned, and we found an empty camp. But you seem deeply interested in the major. If he were younger I would doubly regret not catching him — you see I am jealous of every one you favour."

"My brother Guy is with him now." Then she

turned in her saddle so as to face him. "I had another despatch besides the long one, Captain Fairlee, which I destroyed before you came to the rice crib. It was to Major Bailey, warning him of an intended attack — yours, I presume, though your name was not mentioned — and I was hunting him when I missed my way, and your men took me."

He looked at her gravely for a moment: "Another despatch. I am glad there was something more important than that general order to set you on your hazardous undertaking. It makes your action more reasonable."

"Thank heaven, some other courier was more skilful and more fortunate than I, and carried the warning successfully," she sighed.

"Yes, some one had warned him. I understand he has sworn to capture me; he says he owes it to himself for having overlooked me once."

"We, both of us, know that time." And they reviewed the events of that search.

They had gone some four miles when they came to a piece of road that had been laid with shells, and under Fairlee's whip the horses sped along, their hoofs making a mighty clatter. But suddenly Cicely felt the saddle under her beginning to slip; the girth buckle had opened, and her weight and the rapid riding had done the rest. Calling to Fairlee, she disentangled her foot from the stirrup and

came lightly to the ground, clinging to Bess's mane. He was instantly beside her, but it took several precious moments for the buckle to be righted and the saddle strapped back. And all the while he was talking to her earnestly.

"You might have guessed what I thought of you that evening at Rough-And-Ready; might have seen how I was hourly coming to care even during those first days of your nursing, if your heart had not been so full," he said, answering some evasive words of hers, as he worked at the buckle.

"Perhaps my heart was too empty rather than too full."

"What do you mean? Empty?" He came quite close to her: "Then take me in as its life tenant. The rental of love I pay you will ——"

"I said perhaps it was empty; there are two sides to every proposition."

"Answer me one question: Do you love Lieutenant Clinch?" She turned her head sharply, perhaps in anger, but he persisted: "Do you intend to marry him? Knowing how I feel toward you, you certainly owe it to me to say that much."

Her face was very near to his in the chill January starlight, and her voice was slow and even. "Yes, I do owe you that much. Unless something happens, I shall marry him — some day. He has my word."

He swallowed hard: "Thank you. Shall we mount?"

But as they talked they had led their horses a few paces up the road, and now, with a common start and exclamation, they stopped; for suddenly — hidden from them hitherto by a clump of wayside bushes — they saw a fire about which some twenty men were gathered. They were not more than a hundred yards from the roads and so were easily distinguishable in the glare of the flame.

"Confederates!" cried Fairlee under his breath.

"Then I am safe — they will not harm me; but you must go — go at once," panted the girl.

"Go, and leave you?"

"Yes, yes! I will be safe; I wear their uniform. See, they have evidently heard our horses, and are looking this way. Now they are standing up, listening. Go! I will hold them as long as I can."

"I cannot leave you; it is impossible!"

"But you must. They will protect me, and it will do me no good for you to be captured, no good at all. Oh, be reasonable, be reasonable! See, see! they are running to their horses. Go! I command, I implore you!"

"But, Cicely —"

"Go — go, because — because I — care!"

"You care?" For one intense moment she felt his straining arms about her, his lips on her hair. "Cicely — dearest!"

Then he was in his saddle and she in hers. She could have cursed the hard road that gave back so clearly the hoof beats of his steed, for the sound hastened the movements of the men in the field. They had mounted now and were coming toward her with the speed of a cavalry charge, but first they must turn the end of the intervening hedge. How was she ever to stop them? She wheeled her horse across the narrow road, barring the way as far as possible, and sent a quick glance over her shoulder. God! how slowly Fairlee seemed to be riding out there in the dark!

"Halt! halt!" thundered the approaching band. She threw up her hands as they surrounded her:

"Don't shoot! I, too, am a Confederate!"

In spite of her efforts to block the way, two of the men spurred past her, heading down the road after the fugitive. But one had brought a torch from the camp fire and now threw it up before her, revealing to them her gray cap and coat; yet there were cries of:

"Disguised spy! Shoot him!" and that angry growl of human voices that has in it so much of the wolf. Cicely's blood chilled at the sound, but another lift of the torch threw also into relief the face of the leader of the band.

"Major Bailey! Major Bailey!" the girl cried thrillingly; "don't you know me?"



The amazed leader reined his horse close to her: "God in heaven! It is not ——"

"Yes, it is I — Cicely Houston. Now you know I am no diguised spy. Call back those men from the road — call them back, I say, this instant. The man who galloped off was only my guide. Call back your men, then I will tell you my story."

Quickly the major signalled the bugler, and the notes of the recall flew down the breeze.

"Now," said the old soldier.

But Cicely waited for the returning troopers. The sound of those other galloping hoofs had grown faint and died out of hearing; ten minutes more was all the start Fairlee needed, and a great exhilaration beat in the girl's blood as she gave him his chance, beginning at the very first and lengthening out her story until nearly twice the time had passed. Her presence in the Piper house, the dying scout, the despatches, her resolution and efforts to save Major Bailey's band — these very men who swarmed about her now as she sat her horse in the red flare of the torch — her capture, and the destruction of the dangerous note were all told with a careful detail at which the major now and then exclaimed impatiently. But Cicely was not to be hurried; that horseman headed toward Savannah must be beyond pursuit ere the climax of her tale was reached.

"And you escaped from that crib and through the lines alone, unaided?" asked Major Bailey.

"Oh, no; one who had befriended me before recognized and helped me."

"One of the enemy?"

"A Federal officer."

A glimmer of the truth began to dawn upon Major Bailey. "And the man who helped you was the same one who deserted you just now in the face of my troopers?"

"He did not desert me; I sent him back to save him. Surely he had done his part when he had brought me safely — to you!" There was a touch of coquetry in the inflection of her voice on the last two words, and in the sudden lift and fall of the dark eyes. She was still playing for time.

Major Bailey was human, and his voice softened as he bent toward her. "And the man who rode away yonder, the man you saved was ——"

There was no longer any use for concealment. Far away under the white stars Fairlee was nearing, momentarily, the safety of his picket posts; to overtake him now was impossible. She had won, and in the joy of her success the girl laughed up into the bearded face beside her.

"The man who saved me from Kilpatrick, and who rode away yonder to safety and Savannah, was Captain Allyn Fairlee, of the Sixth Connecticut!"

And for the second time within the month the major bared his head to the three qualities he always saluted — gratitude, resourcefulness, and courage.

CHAPTER XIX

BACK TO PINEHURST

Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break — Tennyson

IT WAS a strange procession that moved out of Mrs. Piper's yard the following morning. The woman was kind, but the comforts of her house were few, and the little money Cicely and Lena had would soon be exhausted. Up in that low-beamed attic room Ray's chances for recovery were small. The girls realized that if he was to get well they must take him back to Pinehurst; and Major Bailey recognized the same fact. At sunrise the soldiers who had accompanied Cicely's return had buried the dead scout, and then, under the major's supervision, the wheels and springs of an old family coach, which Sherman's foragers had brought this far and then dismantled and abandoned, were fitted with a body of rough boards, and Bess and the little one-eyed mule harnessed to it. Mrs. Piper spared a mattress and cover from her depleted store, and Ray was laid carefully on the bed thus improvised. Lena sat on the mattress beside him, ready to give him the comforting touches and

attentions an invalid needs, while Cicely, up in front, drove the ill-assorted team. At her wheel rode Major Bailey, while his men went on before or brought up the rear.

"It is going to be a tedious trip, for you will have to drive slowly because of the jolting," the major said. "I will make the day's journey with you and see you safe for the night, then I will have to turn back; there is no telling when General Wheeler may have work for us."

"I understand," said Cicely. "You are very good to give us so much assistance. We will get on somehow, I am sure. If Ben had only not run away again all would be plain sailing."

"I do not fear any molestation for you from the Yankees. Captain Fairlee's post is the extreme limit to which their scouting parties come; General Wheeler's men are too numerous out here for it to be comfortable for them. It is from runaway negroes that your peril, if there is any, would arise. I wish I had time to see you safely inside the gates of Pinehurst."

"I do not think we will have any trouble; everybody will help a wounded soldier."

"Oh, I shall not send you on alone. My force is small, but I shall spare you at least one protector. I doubly regret now that I sent your brother to headquarters yesterday; he would have been your natural guide. Is there any one of the

men whom you would especially fancy for the service?"

Cicely would have answered in the negative, but her attention was instantly attracted by Sergeant McHenry, who, over the major's shoulder, was gesticulating to her wildly, and tapping himself significantly on the chest, while his left eye went a-winking after a habit it had. She smiled at him with mischievous comprehension.

"Any one of your soldiers would do excellently; but if I felt sure that Sergeant McHenry would not seriously object ——" she began; but that merry twinkle was in Major Bailey's eyes.

"Of course McHenry *will* object seriously and strenuously," he broke in, pretending not to have seen the sergeant's signals, "there being absolutely no attraction for him at Pinehurst; but since you select him I shall lay my commands upon him, and you know a soldier's first duty is to obey. What do you say, McHenry, is it necessary to use compulsion to send you on to Pinehurst with these ladies?"

The sergeant saluted: "Faith, sir, an Irishman never goes back on the ladies — though I am thinking that General Wheeler will be missing me sorely." Again one blue eye closed in a sly wink as he spoke.

"I will guarantee to console him for your absence," replied the major, with a great show of formality.

"You will accompany Miss Houston home, and join me at camp as soon as you can possibly make the return trip." Then when McHenry had dropped back to the rear wheel and was talking with Lena, he added with a sigh: "Your cousin Minna is a charming girl, and McHenry and I both got our wings singed that evening we searched your house; but he is young enough to hope for happy results, while I — but you need not turn your face away, I am not going to talk love to you, for as I said before I know the gap between our birthdays. Yet I cannot help envying Fairlee and Ray here," jerking his thumb over his shoulder, "the youth that admits them to the race for you."

"You are taking a great deal for granted in supposing there is such a race between them."

But he shook his head, unconvinced: "My dear girl, it is easy enough to learn from any of Ray's friends how he feels. And only one thing would have tempted Fairlee not only to plan but to accompany you in your escape from his own custody — love. You will make your choice between them when peace comes. But take an old soldier's advice and remember what the Bible says about 'unevenly yoked together with unbelievers.'"

"By which you mean ——?"

"That Ray is of our people, and Fairlee is reared with opposite views. The time will come, of course, when the bitterness of this strife will die

out, but not with this generation in either section. So I give you this word of warning."

"I never expect to see Captain Fairlee again as long as I live, Major Bailey. Our paths converged only by accident, and the accident will not occur again."

But the major had not come to the five-and-fiftieth mile post of life without taking notes by the way; and he only smiled as he rode beside her: "My dear Miss Houston, I am not so old but that I recall the warm-blooded impetuosity of eight-and-twenty."

Under the influence of a powder that Lena had brought from her father's medicine chest, Ray slept most of that day. The skies were fair, the air balmy even for the Southern winter, so the invalid suffered no special inconvenience; but so slow was the pace the party kept that nightfall found them only fifteen miles from the Piper place.

"But you are well away from the Yankee outposts," said Major Bailey, as they stopped at a cabin and asked for quarters for the night. "I can leave you here and feel quite satisfied."

The cabin was already overflowing with inmates, for the mistress of the mansion that had stood on an eminence to the right had moved here with her family when her home had gone up in the smoke that must always cloud Kilpatrick's name. But hospitality had not burned with the mansion, and the

mistress made them as welcome as though her house were sumptuous. There was no vacant place in the cabin, but the barn was dry and warm; and here, after much coaxing of Bess and the little one-eyed mule, McHenry finally got the nondescript vehicle with the invalid.

"He'll really be better off, and he can sleep here in his own bed," said the sergeant. "I'll be close by."

"And Lena and I will be quite comfortable in the hay in the loft," Cicely insisted. And so it was arranged, in spite of the protestations of the hostess that the best in the cabin was at the service of the wounded soldier.

Cicely's first thought had been for Ray, for his comfort and refreshment, but now he was asleep, and standing at the gate — or rather where the gate should have swung, for Kilpatrick had not spared even the fences in his route — she looked up at Major Bailey, who was preparing to leave with his men, hesitated, and finally asked the question that had burnt on her tongue all day.

"What is done to a soldier if it is discovered that he has aided a prisoner, a supposed spy, to escape?"

"He is court-martialed, unless the circumstances were peculiar and extenuating — and I think they were *very* extenuating." The last clause was spoken with significant emphasis and that merry lighting of the eye that made the bronzed face seem so fine.



Then he added gravely: "I do not think you need feel uneasy about Fairlee; having been clever enough to aid you, he will be clever enough to cover his tracks. However, I'll keep an ear open toward Savannah, and if I hear any news I'll let you know."

The men had formed in the road and were waiting for him. He mounted the horse whose rein he had been holding, and from the saddle held out his hand: "Good-by. When I see your father I shall tell him of the bravest girl in Georgia. If I come to Pinehurst some day, will you show me your rose-room?"

She nodded brightly: "You shall sleep there, and dream ——"

"Of climbing down the ivy vine and breaking the heart of the daughter of the house? Not much! I am not young enough to run after you, but I am much too old to run away from you!" And laughing a little he went clattering away into the starlit dusk.

Ray was awake when she went back to the barn.

"Cicely," he said, feeling for her hand on the edge of the quilt, "what is this I hear about your being captured by Captain Fairlee?"

"Oh, it was nothing. I went to warn Major Bailey of a threatened attack, but got among the Yankees instead, and Captain Fairlee rode part of the way to Mrs. Piper's with me. I sent him back when I saw Major Bailey ahead of us," she explained

lightly. "As he was serving me, of course I did not wish to see him captured."

"It was a squad of his scouts that gave me this wound. I was glad when I heard that he had left Pinehurst, for — it was awfully foolish of me, of course, and I beg your pardon for the thought — but I was beginning to be jealous of him. You gave him so much attention."

The hand in his did not tremble, and when she spoke her voice was without any tremour: "Captain Fairlee regretted your wound at the hands of his men. He did not wish to injure any one connected with Pinehurst."

"Oh, it is a fair fight between us, though I shall always remember our debt to him for protecting you. I shall soon be able to take the field against him again, thanks to your nursing."

"It is to Lena, not to me, that you will owe your cure," she said quickly; but he would not have it so.

"Lena is very good, but the sight of you is my best medicine. I shall be able to sit up by the time we reach Pinehurst."

But when she felt his hot hands her heart misgave her. Had they been wise to bring him out thus in his weak condition? Would his chances not have been better had they kept him in that attic room? Half an hour later she communicated her doubt to Lena as they lay on the hay in the dark loft of the barn. And then, even as they talked

about it, she fell asleep. Lena, hearing the regular breathing, felt her indignation flaming to white heat. She forgot the nervous strain, the hard rides and sleepless hours of the night before, and the patient guiding of that ill-assorted team during the long day. Hers was one of those natures whose capacity for self-abnegation was unlimited, and she could not understand the physical exhaustion that mercifully numbed the mind and freed the heart of the other girl from its anxious strain.

"I wonder if she would have gone to sleep if it had been Captain Fairlee we were discussing?" she said to herself, rising on her elbow to peer into the face beside her. It was not often that she was piqued at Cicely, and even now there was mingled with her anger a little feeling of disloyalty. Had not Cicely chosen her above the others to come on this journey? And how could she have borne to have remained quietly at home and seen Minna or even Cousin Maria come in her place? Then she dropped back on the hay and stared into the blackness of the gable above her:

"Would he have cared for me if my eyes had been dark, I wonder?" and fell asleep with the thought.

They made better progress the next day, for the start was earlier, and much of the road ran through the pine forest, and the drifted needles filled the ruts and made it possible to move more rapidly with-

out any more appreciable discomfort to the sufferer. Lena watched him with unwearying care, moving a cramped limb or easing his head at every rough place in the road. He could never have borne the jolting of a common cart, but the fine springs of the old coach spared him many an agony. Sergeant McHenry, riding close to the wheel, lightened the tedium of the way with stories and jokes.

Sitting in front, holding her reins slack or taut as the road required, Cicely scarcely heard what was being said. She had slept dreamlessly the night before, but with the morning had come a torturing question of self-analysis that would not be laid at rest. In her clouded thoughts were two faces — one, that of the man on the mattress behind her; the other, that of him to whom she had cried in the starlight: "Because I care!" In that exclamation, she now told herself, lay a double treachery — to Ray and to her Southland. Could she put aside her promise to Ray? And could she take into her heart one who was fighting under the banners that had wrought such distress and destruction to her country? So bitterly did she upbraid herself that that other small voice, the voice of her heart, crying for audience, was drowned in the vehement self-condemnation; and at last by a supreme effort of will she thrust the alien face from her thoughts. Immolation might be her share in life, but she was young and the day of sacrifice seemed of

She did not feel like sharing in the talk of the others, but finally she lifted her head and looked about her.

On one side of the road was a field where the owner had planted and the enemy had garnered; on the other was the deep-voiced forest. Upon a post of the broken fence two quarrelsome jays made a gay bit of colour; over her head was the sea-like song of the pines with its ceaseless throb of unrest; and, higher still, the white moon, like a left-over ghost of the night, was blown across the blue sky. And vainly the girl sought to attune her thoughts to the quiet and peace of the scene.

That night they were near enough home to know the people with whom they stayed, and the next afternoon, just before sunset, they turned into the big gate at Pinehurst and stopped before the familiar columns of the porch.

It was as if a great stone was lifted from Cicely's heart when she saw Ray carried into his mother's room and laid on her bed. The responsibility for the journey had been frightful. Several times during that last day she had held her breath in an agony of doubt lest they should not bring him alive to the end of the journey, so exhausted was he, so spent with pain. But it was over at last; she had held his hand and caught his smile of gratitude as he closed his eyes in the sleep he so much needed; and now at last she was free to go away somewhere and be alone. But everywhere some one came to

talk of her capture or the journey, until she had told the story many times. There was no place in all the big house where she could hope for solitude but in the rose-room; and there, in the big carved chair, with the black eyes of the other dead-and-gone Cicely watching her solemnly, she sat and sobbed out her grief.

"Yes," she cried up passionately to the dark face above her. "Yes, the rose-room has added another chapter to its sorrowful history. I have tried to strangle the thought, tried to deny it to my own heart, but — I — I care even as you cared, and I am to suffer even as you suffered!"

She thought of those first times she saw Allyn in Atlanta, and how she had hated him for the uniform he wore. Then of that dreadful day when, but for him, the rough hands of that forager would have torn open her dress and snatched the jewels from her breast; of the pretty pledge they had exchanged, and how, answering his call, she had brought him here to this room and nursed him through those unforgettable weeks. When was it she had begun to care — that night when, with his own sword, she had held him from his mad idea of flight; or that other night when she had hidden him from Major Bailey's searching party? Or, indeed, had something stirred in her heart when, standing by his bedside with Ray, she had felt instinctively the subtle difference between a

man with a man's poise, and an eager-hearted, generous boy?

But what difference did the beginning make when the end was already here, staring her in the face with its inexorable sentence? In the full realization of this, she struck her hands sharply together. Had not this war been cruel enough without robbing her of her heart's happiness? Her country's cause, her friends, her fortune, all had been laid on that altar whose sacrificial fires seemed never to die to ashes; and now her heart was to feel the devouring flame.

The one ray of comfort was that nobody knew. The secret was hers now, and in this, at least, she was better off than that other Cicely, whose wound had been known to all men. At least she would be spared the pity and the gossip that must have been as wormwood to that other proud nature. And long after the house was quiet she sat staring up at the face of the pictured woman, and holding in her hand the knot of gray ribbon that was the one tangible link between her and the man she had thought always to hate as her country's enemy, but whose manliness and truth had broken down her prejudice and swept her from her moorings.

But if the shadow of a tragedy hung about the rose-room, not so much as its edge slipped to the hall below where, in the window alcove, Sergeant

McHenry spent the evening with "the core of his heart."

"It is like heaven to be here, though of course, mavourneen, I am wading in sorrow up to my knees that your cousin was shot. I know what it means, for you see I stopped a bullet myself the first year of the war, and the surgeon thought it was to be taps for me."

"Who nursed you?"

"Oh, you needn't be getting jealous! It was a woman fifty years old and gray as a badger."

"You are very foolish, Sergeant McHenry; why should I be jealous of a nurse?"

"Because a fellow has a way of falling in love with his nurse, if she isn't old enough to be his grandmother, and you don't want me to have been in love with any one else."

"I do not see why I should mind," her tone was studiously indifferent.

"Don't you?" The sergeant's blue eye had closed in that sly wink so often that perhaps it was merely from force of habit that it shut now. "Well, you would not like it because every woman wants to be the only one to whom her husband talks love."

"But you are not ——"

"Your husband? Not yet — worse luck to me! — But I'm going to be, if you will just say ——"

"Really, Sergeant McHenry, you must not pro-

pose to me again; that would be three times in one evening, which is absurd."

"I'd propose three times in a minute if it would make you say 'yes'."

She faced him abruptly: "You will answer me one question?"

"A hundred, if you'll let me hold your ——"

"How many girls did you ever talk love to?"

He hesitated: "How many girls —? Really, mavourneen, an Irishman has a poor memory for figures like that. Why don't you ask me how much I love you?"

"Because I could draw my own conclusions if I only knew my number in your list — whether I am the first or the fiftieth."

"Well, at least you are the last."

"Up to the present time. I suppose there will be several other 'last' ones."

He laid his hand on his heart: "By the honour of Erin, no!"

"I'd rather you swore by the honour of America."

"One oath is the same as another to me."

"You swear as you make love — from force of habit?"

Again the sergeant's left lid drooped for a fleeting moment: "From force of nationality, I should rather say."

She sighed with mock incredulity: "Does an Irishman ever mean half he says?"

"On the contrary, does he ever say half he means, when he is talking to the very core of his heart?" He had the most flattering glance in the world, and it now spoke as eloquently as his words; but she purposely misunderstood.

"I do not know that it is so nice to be the core of anything; you — you have to peel off so many outside layers before you get to it."

"But when you get there, it is the supreme arrival — there is nothing beyond."

"Oh, I always hate the very end of things; it sounds like the clods on a coffin at a funeral," she said, changing her tactics with the accustomed ease of her sex when cornered.

"We might always put the layers back and begin the peeling process over again," he suggested tentatively.

"Which means," she flashed, "that you might always return to your love-making with other girls in between the times of revealing to me the core of your heart!"

"What difference would it make? You said just now that you would not be jealous."

"Jealous! I should think not." But the toe of her slipper was tapping the polished floor, and he was watching her with delight; for in her hazel eyes was shining a promise of the very thing she was denying.

"But the others would see only the outside layers;

I would always bring the core back to you." His arm was creeping along the window ledge close to her waist.

"Thanks; but I'd have no earthly use for it."

"Not even as an evidence that I could not stay away from you — that no other girl counted, that in the end I *must* come back?"

"I said just now that I hated the end of things."

His face fell: "You are a perfect tangle of contradictions! You refuse to believe that you are first, and you decline to be last, and ——"

"And I most positively object to being in the middle — one is always so scrouged between two others," she said, and by way of illustration coolly spread out her skirts so as to occupy more space on the window seat.

"Well, how about being all three — first, middle and last in my heart?"

But she was not to be cajoled by his tender tones: "I believe I studied in my natural philosophy that no body could occupy more than one place at a time."

"Well, you had no business studying philosophy; no woman ought to know anything about it!"

"Indeed! You want us to be ignoramuses?"

"I want you to know just enough of grave books to conjugate the verb 'to love', and that in but two tenses, the present and the future. Can't you say it to me, colleen — 'I love' and 'I will love'? It's easy enough."

"And how about the past tense — 'I have loved'?"

"But you hadn't before you knew me."

"*Hadn't* I?" her tone, with its rising inflection, said a hundred things.

"Was it Joe Howell?" There was a growl in his voice that set her pulses off to the tune of a rollicking jig.

"Why, do you know Joe?" she cooed the name like a dove calling its mate.

"Of course I know him. I heard him talking about you in camp the other night."

She sat up with animation; "Indeed! What did he say?"

"Oh, many things — that you had the prettiest eyes he ever saw, and were the finest girl in Georgia. I wanted to break his head!"

"Break his head? Upon my word, Sergeant McHenry, I think that was a very queer desire. If you do not admire me yourself you need not murder my friends for their bad taste!"

"I did not want to hit him for what he said — for heaven knows I think you have the prettiest eyes under the stars, and that you are the finest girl, not only in Georgia but in the whole world. I wanted to hit him because he had dared to look at you close enough to know all he said was the truth. Come, Minna darling, I'm not like you, I'm as jealous as the devil, I confess it; and if

you don't stop talking about Joe Howell or letting him hang around you, I'll — I'll ——"

"Goodness! you look black enough to eat him alive, raw-head-and-bloody-bones."

"And I will, or something like it. But you are going to tell me that there wasn't any past tense to that verb — that you never loved Joe." He had pushed aside the spreading folds of her dress and moved into the space thus cleared.

"Why, I never said I loved Joe," she let him see under the lashes of her hazel eyes for just one seductive moment.

"Well, you said something that sounded devilish like it! By St. Denis, it's easier to fight Sherman's bummers than a skirmisher like you! But this is my last grand charge, an assault all along the line — will you have me or will you not?"

"You are awfully explosive; your words sound like a bunch of popping crackers."

"Will you take me? Answer in just one word."

But still she fenced: "I — I thought it was always customary to ask a girl if she loved you before you asked if she would marry you?"

"If you'll say you'll marry me, I'll take it for granted that you love me."

"But I do not propose to have my love taken for granted!"

"Then, by heavens, I'll take it without the granting — and you along with it!"

His arm had slipped from the window sill and held her in its close curve.

"Sergeant McHenry!"

"My name is Terence; say it, colleen, say it!"

She tried to pull away, but it was useless.

"Say Terence, Minna, mavourneen."

"It's — it's such a long name."

"Terry, then — call me Terry."

"That is so ——"

"So short? — You skirmisher! — but never think of the length; just try it. Long or short, it's easy enough." His arm was drawing her closer, his shoulder touched hers.

"Well — then — Terry!"

It was only a breathless little whisper, but he heard it, for his face was close to hers in the seductive dusk of the alcove. And this time his amorous lips did not miss their aim, for her little boxing hand was a fast prisoner in his.

"After the war, with a license and his reverence?" he whispered.

But she had twisted herself out of his hold and now mocked him with her laughing eyes: "Yes — unless Joe happens to come first, prepared in like manner. Of course I couldn't ——"

"Oh, Joe be d — d!" he cried, and lifting the loose sleeve of her dress put it reverently to his lips.

CHAPTER XX

APPOMATTOX

The conflict is over, the struggle is past — Hoffman

THOSE end-of-January days crept at a snail's pace. The fine weather of the early winter had broken up; for days at a time the sun did not shine, and the monotonous drip, drip of the rain was maddening to Cicely as she planned the harassing economy that had become necessary in the big house, or sat by Ray's bed and watched the fever signs rise or subside as he tossed and moaned. For the depleted condition of his whole system was augmenting the danger from his wound, and there were times when the watchers dreaded the midnight turn, lest his spirit go out on the ebb-tide of the hours.

Cicely had nursed Fairlee with the clear-headed watchfulness of a professional, but to this case she brought a passionate anxiety that wrought deeply upon her own nerves and at times reflected itself unfavourably upon the patient. At such moments Lena took her by the shoulders and put her out of the room.

"You are letting your uneasiness master you so entirely that you are unfit to nurse him. Look how your hands shake; you spilled the water on the pillow." Or again: "You are so tremulous that he did not get all of that last powder, and you know how scarce medicine is, and how necessary it is that every dose should have its full effect."

And Cousin Maria, watching the two, thought how vehemently Cicely's heart had gone out to her boy, and that Lena was quiet and steady of hand because she had only the old playfellow friendship at stake. She could not see that Cicely's nervousness grew out of an intense fear that in some way she might lack in loyalty and care because her heart was sick within her; and that for Lena the whole interest of life was concentrated here at this bedside.

As an antidote to the strain and nervousness, Cicely turned eagerly to the news from the outside world. General Hardee had marched to Charleston to defend that city, if possible, against Sherman, who was preparing to move out of Savannah. The wildest rumours were current as to the fate of the former city. From Washington, Halleck was urging Sherman to destroy it utterly and sow the site in salt, and it was well known that on South Carolina, and particularly on Charleston, rested the ill-will of that army that had marched through Georgia, and that their commander-in-chief had

said he would make no attempt to restrain his troops in their vengeance lest such restraint react on the general morale of the army! Nothing, therefore, but absolute destruction was before the condemned city, for Hardee's force could only hope to stave off the evil hour, not avert it. Thus Charleston sat by the winter sea awaiting her doom, and Cicely's thoughts wearied for her father, who was there.

Reading all the horrors, actual and anticipated in his letters, Cicely began to plan hopelessly for the end. Then suddenly, in the first February days, came the tidings that Sherman had indeed evacuated Savannah, but that he had left the Charleston route to the right, and was pushing upward toward Virginia through the Carolinas to fall upon Lee from the rear, and so grind the Confederacy as between two millstones; for Grant was still hammering at Richmond from the north. Minna had this news in a letter over which she blushed and frowned in the bay-window in the hall; for although Sergeant McHenry wrote ardently of his love, he sometimes spelled it with an Irish accent, and "the core of his heart" was puzzled to catch his meaning.

"But, I don't care about the spelling; it is all perfectly beautiful!" she sighed. "He says he adores me and he shades his capitals exquisitely."

"And what of Joe Howell," Cicely asked, standing

in the opening of the alcove curtains and smiling down at the radiant girl.

"Joe? — Oh, I do not know. Maybe I'll will him to Lena when — when I am really married. I shall keep him for a while, though, to make Ter — Sergeant McHenry jealous. I never thought it wise in a girl to give up all her beaux until the wedding was accomplished."

"It is a little like an army surrendering its ammunition," laughed Cicely.

"Yes; and then I think the ceremony is so much more interesting if the bride knows some one in the company is swearing behind his teeth and wishing it was he who stood beside her, making all those lovely vows."

"I had never thought of that."

Minna twisted the letter in her hand: "Well, it is so. Don't you think that Lena and Joe would make a nice couple? I'd like to leave him ——"

"I don't think you need worry to make any provision for him; he will not be near as inconsolable as you imagine — men never are."

"That's horrid of you, Cicely. Think what would become of Ray if by any chance you should throw him over for Captain Fairlee!"

But Cicely had dropped the curtain and turned away: "You need not be angry with me," called Minna, "I know you are not going to fall in love with a Yankee—though I must say he was perfectly dear!"

There was no answer, but on the stair Cicely was repeating to herself the question; and was answering it behind her tight little teeth: "Ray should never know."

The next morning she had a letter of her own.

"Big Ben come ter de quarters las' night," Jake said, as he put the missive in her hand; "but he in sech er hurry ter git back he wouldn't wait twell mornin' ter see you. He say de army movin' an' he skeered he lose de cap'un som'eres in C'alina, 'cause he doan know de road."

"He is with Captain Fairlee?"

"He say he de cap'un's body survent, but I doan know what de cap'un want wid 'im. Yo' pa wouldn't look at 'im. Big nigger lak dat got no bizness foolin' er roun' wid er gemman's collars an' cuffs; he ought ter be in de cornfiel' 'hine er plow an' er pa'r er mules. I'd lak ter put 'im dar right now."

"You will never do so again, for he is free now, free to go when and where he likes. And so are you, Jake; don't you want to go away top?"

He looked at her with a queer glint in his eyes: "I ain 'sputin', missy, but what freedom is got er good soun' ter me; jes lak I kin set 'roun' in de shade an' smoke mah pipe all day, an' holler ter one er de chillun ter fetch me er gou'd er cool water. But me an' Milly done talk it over, an' we ain never hyeard tell er any place so fur erway dat we

wouldn't be wantin' ter come back home — 'specially Milly, 'caise she done nuss you an' de boys sence you all was little; an' her own gal's grave's out yonder under de cedars. So we done 'cluded dat so long's we couldn't *stay* gone, 'tain no use goin'."

She laid her hand gently on the old man's arm, tears in her eyes: "I am glad you feel that way, Jake. It would break my heart to part with mammy, and I do not know how on earth I would get on without you until father comes."

"You jes nacher'ly couldn't, chile," he said, with simple conviction. "An' dars anudder reason what's in mah mine — whilst I was runnin' 'roun' tekin' mah freedom who gwine hep you start de plows soon's de rain stops."

Her letter from Fairlee was short, written on the eve of departure from Savannah, but it told her what she wanted to know — how he had explained to Kilpatrick her escape from the rice crib.

I met no one during my swift gallop back to camp, and you may be sure I did gallop! listening always for sounds of pursuit, believing you were safe, but doubting your ability to hold the troopers back. Of course it was easy for me to pass the pickets, with my own countersign, and I had been in my tent less than half an hour when we were suddenly attacked by a party of Confederate cavalry men, sent, I am told, by General Wheeler on advice of your old friend, Major Bailey, who had learned of our isolated position. We had a sharp skirmish and in the dark were driven from our position, and found a safer one a few miles nearer the city. Had you remained in the crib, you

would have been rescued by your own troops, so it was quite easy to give General Kilpatrick that impression, and as I had your despatch, it did not matter much about you; particularly as I described you as very young and evidently satisfied not to attempt any more scouting. It was a most fortunate solution of the situation for me, and as our loss in the skirmish was light, I feel rather grateful to your brother Guy, who, I understand from one of our scouts, was Major Bailey's messenger to Wheeler. Guy was among those who attacked us, and I am hoping that he escaped injury, for you know my earnest wish was that none of your people would be directly in conflict with me during the rest of this war.

Even yet I shudder with horror when I think of the risk you ran that night — what might have happened if some other command besides mine had captured you. Sometimes I wake from sleep with a start, dreaming of you in General Kilpatrick's custody! But all my life I shall bless my good angel for the ride with you under the stars! No other hour ever held for me such happiness. It was different at Pinehurst the few times we were alone, for there you did not need me; but the thought that there in the dark world I was your only protector went like wine to my head. You are to marry your cousin, you told me, with the candour of your true womanliness; but you sent me back to safety because — you cared! I could have found it in my heart to kill my horse if it had failed to carry me safe after those words, for failure would have seemed like treachery to your trust in him.

Because you care! All the regret of the coming years — those years when I must cease to think of you, or remember you only as Raymond Clinch's wife — will never dim the joy those words brought to my heart. And yet it is a selfish joy, for I should wish instead, for sake of your own happiness, that you loved your cousin. But I think only an archangel could do that; and I am but a man, with a man's keen hunger and thirst for her who, to him, is the one woman in the world. So you will forgive my selfishness.

To-morrow we break barracks here and begin the northward march that is to put us in the rear of Lee's army and end this strife. Ben refuses to leave me, so I take him to care for my horses. He will carry this to you at Pinehurst and join us in

South Carolina — cutting across the country to do so. Will you send me a few words in answer, telling me of your own self and safety? If nothing comes, if once more Ben returns empty-handed, I shall take it as my final dismissal, and as a sign that you desire our paths to part definitely and permanently. Knowing the loyalty of your nature I shall make no further appeal to you; but know what my heart would say if allowed to cry to you.

The creaking of the shutter grated on Cicely's over-strung nerves; she hated the sound. It was out of that window that she and Allyn had leaned to listen to the far-off bombardment of Fort McAllister, and through that window he had slipped away to resume his place in the fight. Here at this very table he had written her his farewell, and from here she must send him her final word.

Slowly she stretched out her hand and took up the pen, spreading the white paper before her. The date she wrote in the corner stared at her, awaiting the next words. How should she begin; what should she say to him? Then the pen fell from her hand, blotting the unwritten page. There was no use in writing anything; his messenger was already gone back; there was no one to carry a reply. She looked up blankly for a moment at the patch of gray sky between the rose-tinted curtains. If he had no answer he would take it as a sign that she wished their paths to part definitely and permanently — that was what he had said. And no answer had gone to him.

Here, then, was the end.

She caught the edge of the table sharply, for, as if it were some mighty pendulum, the whole world seemed to swing away, leaving her alone, isolated, with a frightful chasm at her feet across which she longed to cry out, to beckon to Fairlee. But the impulse died, and in its place there came a mastering, strangling conviction that this was best, this last and absolute parting of the ways. The departure of his messenger had cut off her one chance of retreat from the hard paths of duty and loyalty. It was not an accident; it was the hand of Fate itself.

Gradually her mouth tightened and hardened. There were to be no tears this time; but into her eyes there crept a shadow that had never been there before. Presently she arose, and, crumpling the dated paper into a ball, threw it upon the fire. The upward flash of the flame lit the room with a momentary glow of colour; then on the hearthstone and in the girl's heart were only the ashes as of a memory.

The next morning Ray, opening his eyes suddenly, found her sitting beside him staring off into space.

"Cice'y," he whispered, "you look so pale and worn. You must not worry about me; I shall get well, and we will be so happy — so happy."

She smoothed his pillow and drew the counterpane up to his chin; but she did not speak.

"I wish you could always do that for me;

the others are kind, but it is so much sweeter to have you." His voice was little more than a thread of sound, with many breaks from his weak breathing.

"Hush," she answered quickly, for the door was opening, "here is Lena; you will hurt her feelings, and she has been good, so good to you."

"I know; but it is you ——" But under pretext of again straightening the coverlet, she laid her finger lightly on his lips. Lena, reaching the bedside, dropped to her knees.

"You slept well, Ray?"

But instead of answering he turned his face from her with a fretful movement. She saw the irritation he was physically too weak to conceal, and intuitively she guessed the explanation: she had been an interruption, she was not wanted. But only a tightening of the lips betrayed her knowledge. She remained as she was for a moment, then drew herself up by means of the bedpost, and left the room. Cicely, following, caught her in the hall just where the sunlight, that came so rarely these days, was working out that intricate colour-pattern through the stained window, and as the two held each other in a close embrace, the purple and gold rays fell over them like some anointing chrism.

"Cicely ——"

"Hush, dear, hush! I know."

"You know — how — how did ——?"

"I guessed it long ago; and I am so sorry, so sorry!"

But directly the golden head was lifted and the blue eyes looked into the shadowed brown ones: "And sometimes I have thought that you — I have thought that we bear the same burden."

"Hush, hush! You must not imagine things."

And as they held each other the fickle sunlight slipped away, and the brilliant colours faded to the dull gray of the February morning. And one had found a comforter, and one had found an accuser.

How dared any one refuse Ray the love he asked?

By some subtle telepathy they read each other's mental attitude; and neither knew how to break the awkward silence that ensued, and neither wished to be the first to let go her hold upon the other — it seemed somehow like loosing the old bonds between them. The tapping of Grandma Houston's cane along the floor behind them was an immense relief.

"Is Ray worse?" the old lady cried.

"No, grandma."

"Seeing you together like that gave me quite a turn — I thought you were crying. Why do you look so sad if he is no worse?"

"We are always apprehensive, and Lena insists on doing so much that she has overtaxed her strength."

"You are both worn out. Maria and I will take your places, to-night."

"Oh, no, Grandma Houston; nobody can ——" began Lena breathlessly; but the patrician old face grew satirical.

"If you will allow me to remind you, my dear Lena, I raised four children of my own, and I nursed your mother before you were born."

Nobody ever contradicted Grandma Houston when she spoke like that, and Lena did not break the rule; but Cicely knew that in spite of the old lady's commands there would be a third watcher beside the invalid that night.

"I was in search of you, Cicely," the old lady continued. "Jake tells me you are thinking of riding to the upper farm to see what provisions we have left there. I could not think of allowing you to go, my child; it would not be safe. Jake will do quite as well alone."

"Just as you say, grandma; but we must have something to live on. The upper farm, being ten miles out of the track of the Federal army, may have escaped pillage."

For food to support life was becoming scarcer every day. And besides the family in the house, there were the idle negroes. Many of them had gone, following the Union army or wandering at their own behests, brain-drunk with the thought of freedom. But some twenty-five or thirty re-

mained in the quarters, among them some deserted children, and these had to be fed and cared for out of the poverty left in Sherman's wake. When the rains ceased Cicely found respite from the anxiety of the sick room in rides to the quarters and over the plantation, trying to start the crop that was to feed the hungry mouths during the coming year. A few of the negroes expressed their willingness to go to work, confident of the justice of their former master, but most of them were dilatory and undecided, and a few inclined to be insolent and defiant. For an "agent" from Savannah had already been among them, sowing the seeds of dissatisfaction and those ideas as to "equal rights" that were to bear such bitter fruit for both races in the future.

"No'm, I won't hab no time fer ter wuk fer you," said one negro who had always been a fire-brand for insubordination.

"What do you expect to do?" asked Cicely, as she sat on her horse before his cabin door. It was not always easy to answer quietly, but Grandma Houston had exhorted her to patience.

"I gwine ter be busy fer mahse'f. Mr. Blake, he done talk ter we all at church las' night, an' he say de guv'mint gwine gi' every nigger forty acres er lan' an' er mule, so I'll be wurkin' uf mah own crap."

"Did not father always allow each of you who cared to work it, a patch of his own?"

"Yes'um."

"And did you not always have the money for whatever was sold from it?"

"Yes'um. But dat was yo' pa's lan', an' now I gwine hab forty acres uf mah own." And in his assumption of landlordism, the negro threw out his chest and would have put his hat on, only something in Cicely's glance deterred him.

"An' whar you gwine git yo' forty acres?" asked Jake, who, on the little one-eyed mule, had accompanied Cicely on her tour.

"Mr. Blake say as how we could chosen our lan'; an' I 'spec, I'll pick dat lo' groun' fiel' fer mine." The low-ground field was the best on the plantation, and there was a swagger in the man's manner that lit Jake's eyes with fury.

"Look here, nigger, maybe Mr. Blake got some lan' ter gi' erway, I ain 'sputin' his word, but dis here is *marster's* lan', an' dar ain gwine be no pickin' an' choosin' on it. You got ter wuk for marster on sheers jes lak missy been tellin' yer, or you got ter git out."

But the man was sullen and unresponsive, and Cicely rode home with a new trouble in her mind. She had known, of course, that slavery was at an end, but this insubordination and these bold claims

brought the new condition of things home to her in a different and an appalling light. How was the South to cope with the suddenly emancipated slaves if these questions of equality and peremptory ownership were injected into the new situation? Was the war to be fought all over again; or was there to be a race conflict more terrible in its results than the strife just ending? For well she knew the Anglo-Saxon blood of her section would never submit to the degradation of equality with an inferior race. Not all the armaments of all the world, united in one stupendous effort, could force this issue upon the South, prostrate though she was in defeat and ruin. Before African equality, she would choose absolute annihilation; and from the last battle-field cry up to the God of Hosts who made even one star to differ from another star in glory: "You made us different, and we give you back, untainted, the blood you put into our veins!"

On this principle of racial superiority and racial segregation the South had stood since the coming of the first ship load of slaves in the old colonial days. And on this same principle she would stand through the coming uncounted years. There were half-breeds, but they always went to the dark side of the social line.

Far into the night Cicely and Grandma Houston sat talking sorrowfully and anxiously of the future;

for they both saw that the laying down of arms was to be but for the picking up of a new burden.

With her mind full of these forebodings, Cicely took her candle and started to the rose-room, which she now occupied as her own. But a light in the library attracted her, and opening the door she found Minna bending over a portfolio.

"What are you doing here at this hour of the night?"

Minna looked up guiltily, then answered with her usual candour: "I was just looking to see if, by any good chance, Lena had made me that picture of Sergeant McHenry and his little moustache; but she hasn't. I find Ray ad infinitum, a profile of Joe Howell, and even that sketch of Captain Fairlee with the queer shoulder, but no sergeant."

"And so the portfolio seems empty?" quizzed Cicely.

"Absolutely." And with a petulant pout she slammed it to, and pushed back her chair. "I tried to interest Lena in Joe Howell to-day, praised him for everything I could think of, personal appearance, mental traits and all the rest."

"And what did she say?"

"Looked at me without so much as blinking, and asked me that silly old question: Why I did not throw Terry over and take him myself if he were so perfect."

"A very natural question."

times of women who wish to palm off their old lovers on other girls."

"Do you know, Cicely, I begin to believe Lena is in love with somebody. It is out of reason for a girl who is not cross-eyed or hare-lipped to come to the age of eighteen and never to have thought of a sweetheart." Then the mischievous hazel eyes danced upward from the book on the table: "But, dear me, how delightfully and inspiringly jealous that sweetheart would be if he could see her waiting on Ray!" Then she went to bed, leaving Cicely in doubt as to how much of Lena's pitiful secret she had guessed.

The next day when Lena carried her portfolio up stairs, the picture of Captain Fairlee was missing.

When the clouds have all converged, then comes the final breaking of the storm. So it was with the war; the climax was at hand. Wilson, with thousands of blue-clad cavalry, rode unopposed through Alabama and sections of the devoted Georgia country, ready to cut off any retreat to the south-west, should the lines above leak and the Confederates slip through. Sherman had marched through the Carolinas as he had marched through Georgia, marking his track with ashes. Johnston, once more in command in Hood's stead, was in North Carolina with the residue of such Confederate forces as he could gather, yearning to reach

and aid Lee in Virginia. But Sherman watched him from Raleigh, while Stoneman's brigade poured through the mountain passes to the west, and waited for a chance to strike. And all this time Grant sat stolidly and immovably before Lee's intrenchments at Richmond. The great armies were like men upon a chess-board, with the game nearly won. With bated breath the whole country awaited the next move, knowing it would be the last.

But there was to be one more flash of light before the final darkness. Fort Stedman overlooked the trenches of Petersburg. If the Confederates could gain that, it might be the talismanic key to unlock the situation and open a way of escape for the pent-up army. At all events it was a strong strategic point; the order for its capture was given; and one day under the windows of old Blanford Church, which for ten long months had stood like a sleepless sentinel close to the firing line, and been to the soldiers in gray, arsenal and hospital and mausoleum — under those century-old windows went the sound of galloping hoofs. Gordon, with his splendid corps, swept out to the assault. Not a man there but knew it was a forlorn hope — not a man there but knew that as he now rode, so might he never ride again. Five thousand strong they went, and the rush of them was as the rush of the storm wind, fierce, thrilling. Above them flew the torn battle flag that had been their guiding star

for four long years; where it went they followed. Before them, in an awful stillness, waited the masked guns of the hostile fort; and from beside those guns two angels were beckoning to the thin gray line — and one angel was Fame and one was Death.

The force of the attack was terrific, the struggle titanic, and two armies held their breath to watch. For the space of an arrow's flight all was confusion and storm and strife, the clash of men keyed up to desperation. Then out of the surge the torn battle flag was hurled rearward; and above the hellish fire and smoke the stars-and-stripes blossomed triumphant — for the forlorn hope had failed.

Slowly the maimed and broken remnant of that gallant assaulting line trailed backward past the human wreckage toward the beleaguered city; and Old Blanford stretched out her churchly arms and took to her breast the hearts that were bleeding, and the hearts that would bleed no more forever!

Following that assault there came a hush as of a long inward drawn breath. And then there blew through all the land, on every breeze that wafted a cloud or fluttered a flower, the tidings of Appomattox — the death-note of the Confederacy. And the war had passed into history.

And down in the Georgia country, where the

young-eyed April was covering Sherman's swath of desolation with a tender tapestry of bloom, Cicely Houston heard that far-off death-cry of her lost cause and with her hands upon her breast she lifted her eyes to the clear blue heavens, and in them were no tears.



CHAPTER XXI

THE MARTIAL PAGEANT

And one with banners flying in the sun,
And bugles blowing clear;
And one in sadness and defeat — K

APPOMATTOX was but five days past when again the whole country shuddered and thrilled with startling tidings.

Abraham Lincoln was dead.

The assassin's bullet had cut down the man on whom the eyes of the two sections — both the North and the South — waited expectantly, the man who for all years after was to stand out gigantic, immortal, against the background of his time. While the funeral train crept all the long, slow way from Washington to Illinois, carrying the dead ruler to his last resting place, the whole nation waited in a hushed reverence, a wondering uncertainty.

But the reins of government may not fall slack, though the heart of the nation mourns. And so, with the memorial wreaths still unfaded on the grave of Lincoln, President Johnson, knowing the impatience of the soldiers to return to their homes,

ordered a grand review of the two Union armies that had converged at Washington after the terms of peace had been dictated — Grant's Army of the Potomac and Sherman's Army of the West. Along the banks of the Potomac the spreading white army tents made a new, ephemeral city where the soldiers welcomed vehemently the presidential order, and began preparations for the review as the first step toward disbandment and separation. Four years they had marched and fought together under the slanted snows or the fiery sun of the South, but now the parting was at hand, and beyond the coming pageant lay the reunion with friends and relatives they had not seen in years.

The appointed day dawned at last. The April sky was as blue as a turquoise new-mined from the dark, and the April breeze toyed with bursting blossom and greening bough. The nation's capital was gay with the nation's colours and the revived glories of the springtime. Everywhere flowers smiled, and lengths of tri-coloured bunting went billowing in the wind. For the boys in blue had accomplished their mission, the Union was preserved, and the heart of Columbia was glad within her and eager to welcome the victors from the long-fought fray.

Down Pennsylvania Avenue, and so on through the city, the martial procession was to move, and long before



inhabitants of the city, augmented by thousands of outsiders who had come for the holiday pageant, thronged the grandstands erected along the way and packed the sidewalks from doorstep to curbstone with a solid mass of humanity—men, women, and children from every walk of life, come to witness the triumphant glorification of the stars-and-stripes. Here were fathers of the men who marched yonder; here were dim-eyed mothers, yearning for a sight of the sons sent out with tears to hold together the rending edges of the nation; here were children not long born when the strife began; and here were women star-eyed and dewy-lipped with youth, bearing flowers and favours to throw to lovers as they rode past in the glittering line, the lovers they had lent at the call of the government, and for whom they had waited through the war-ring years.

And down the avenue they went, the men in blue for whom the applauding people watched. Two hundred thousand strong they marched, those who had followed the Virginia campaigns, and those who had tramped thousands of miles through the heart of the South country. Thirty miles long the shining line was as it uncoiled like a blue python through the peaceful streets of the exultant city.

Each army had its own characteristics, its own appendages. Before each division of Sherman's went the negro axemen who had cut new roads for

the invading host through the Georgia swamps and the Carolina forests, and behind each followed some trophy of that march — carts of the captured plunder, lowing cattle from the rich plantations, and here and there a negro woman leading her emancipated children.

With the rhythmic precision of machinery the columns, twenty deep, swung onward, company after company, division after division, corps after corps, their bayonets like a gleaming forest of steel in the shine of the sun, their flags garlanded with flowers, their bands playing the wordless songs of victory. Cheer after cheer greeted them, and round after round of applause followed them, as, for more than twelve hours on those two historic April days, they tramped down the wide avenue, their leaders dipping their swords in salutation before the stand where sat the highest official of the land, surrounded by his cabinet and a brilliant company of home dignitaries and foreign diplomats.

Hep, hep, hep, how the strong tread of those thousands of marching feet fired the imagination and quickened the blood! Not Sparta after Platea nor France after Austerlitz beheld a more satisfying sight. Not Rome, back in the old days of her pomp and pride, kept such a feast to Mars, witnessed such a triumphal procession. Those who saw it were to carry the memory down into the darkening shadows of the everlasting valley.

Two hundred thousand strong! What was there for a nation to fear with an army like that; unless, indeed, as some foreign potentates were prophesying, the peril should come from the army itself. For a force, trained, equipped and self-confident as that was, could dictate the policies of government, either for the perpetuation of a republic or the setting up of an empire. Had they so willed it, it was theirs to choose a dictator, to crown or uncrown kings. But in the faces of the men swinging down the avenue under the April's golden sun, was the shadow of no such thought. No sordid ambition for military despotism disturbed the joy of their home-coming. They had fought the fight set them; the battle and the bivouac were left behind, and now they were dreaming of mansion or of cottage — of the mother-eyes that waited there, of sweetheart, or of wife and little ones. The musket was not to change into the rod of the ruler, for it was the civic spirit, not the spirit of the Janizaries, that was marching under the victorious Union banners.

But there was one man among all that exultant host who remembered the reverse side of this brilliant picture. Allyn Fairlee, riding at the head of his company, was loyal to the flag floating above him. He had wanted the Union kept inviolate, and he was satisfied with the part he had played in helping to preserve it. Another four years he would have fought for it had it been neces-



sary. But his contact with Southerners and his stay at Pinehurst had given him a new light on the foe he had fought. Before he had known only the South of the politician; now he knew the South of the people. He realized the absolute faith those people had in their right to secede, and understood the passionate devotion they had carried to their cause. No men ever loved their country better than those men of Dixie. This they proved by the sacrifices they made, by the fight they waged. With everything to lose and scarcely a chance of success, they went into that fight, picking up their rifles at the call of the State. Set aside from the rest of the country by the pastoral and agricultural nature of their pursuits, by training, and by the fact that the original blood of the section had been but little diluted by immigration, they were Americans; but first, and above all, they were Southerners. Against a foreign foe they would have stood shoulder to shoulder with the North; no outside hand should have plucked a feather from the eagle that was their country's emblem; but if they themselves wished to withdraw from the shadow of those brooding wings and set up a banner of their own, they held it was their inalienable right.

When Sumter's guns sounded the reveille of the Confederacy, it was with each Southern state to fall into the same old conditions. That



The declaration of a new nation was their answer.

Viewed now through the backward-slanting light of experience, how fearless yet how futile that declaration seemed. A minority of states, less densely populated than the North and West, with an alien race dwelling among them — a race that might be a non-combatant burden or a foe within the breastworks; with no arsenals, no foundries, no munitions, no machinery of war, and not a corporal's guard for a standing army, there seemed no possibility and scarcely a shadow of hope for success against the organized government that held in its hands the treasury, the trained army, and all the resources and facilities of war. But they had waged a wonderful fight, those men of the South, battling for their rights! Outnumbered, insufficiently equipped, under paid, poorly clothed, and half-starved, those grim warriors in gray for four years confronted and baffled and often defeated *the finest army that ever assembled at the call of a president*. What they suffered neither they nor historians have ever told. And not only they, but their families, for they were the invaded, not the invaders. The family of the Union soldier slept in peace; but the wife of the Confederate heard her children cry for bread, and knew the sickening odour of the torch that left her homeless and turned her babies helpless into the night. Perhaps that was

one reason the soldier of the Confederacy fought as he did; for when the end had come and the war ravens numbered the dead in hospitals and on scattered battle plains, seven hundred thousand Union corpses was the total count. A strife like that was a martial cyclorama, the like of which the world may never see again.

Allyn Fairlee understood these things in outline, and knew that to this brilliant pageant of which he was a part and in which he rejoiced, there was a companion picture: The return of the defeated soldiers of Dixie!

Not in martial ranks, not with drum-note or bugle call, not with colours flying to the wind, did they go home; but in scattered bands or singly, some of them even afoot, straggling backward from the fields of final failure. Broken in health and broken in hope, they came to their broken homes. Everywhere was privation, everywhere was destruction, everywhere a new and undreamed-of order of things. History, in all its annals, does not record a condition like that which confronted these veterans of the Lost Cause; for never before had a defeated people found an inferior slave race set suddenly side by side with them upon the same political plane. It would have been comparatively easy, with the aid of time, to repair the ravages of war, to rebuild homes and amass new fortunes, but this race question was as the wolf that perpetually

muddled the waters of the spring of adjustment. As a century had gone to the up-building of this problem, so, perhaps, would another century go to its solution.

And yet it was not all dark, for by the piles of ashes that had once been happy homes, these returning soldiers of the South found a-bloom the rarest flower that breaks the calyx of the years — the love and sympathy of tender women. And with this flower on their breasts, they set themselves to teach the world the hardest lesson of war — that of how to be conquered; how to sheathe the sword and yield the banner and yet be men, not weaklings. And while they were doing this, Fame's silver bugles blew their prowess and their devotion to the uttermost corners of the earth. Not Poland, with her unhealing scars of fire and sword; not Jerusalem, watching the return of the children of the captivity, had more of national pride, more of national pathos than the South during those bitter days.

Something of that other sad return Fairlee was picturing to himself as he rode with the pomp of the parade. The thought, by contrast, was so depressing that he strove to put it from him, but not until he reached the President's stand and cut the air with a quick sword-flash of salutation for the officials and for his own general who stood there watching his men with stern pride, did the haunting images leave him.

"I will not remember anything of those four years but the fight," he resolved, with clinched teeth. "Why should I regret the woes of a section where I got my wound of body and of heart? The South has no claim on me, holds no promise for me — I will forget it!"

But resolutions are treacherous things when not backed up by the will. On the next grandstand a girl stood with a flag in one hand and a rose in the other, a tall girl with pale gold hair and forget-me-not eyes. They had played together as children, danced together through starry June nights while he was yet a cadet at the Point; and she, at least, had not forgotten. He had known she was to be there on the stand, for she had written him that morning; and reading her note in his tent as he made ready for the parade, he had suddenly caught a glimpse of her heart between the lines, and in a vague, groping way he had asked himself if, after all, his life was to set back into that old channel of childhood. As he glanced upward now and met her smile he knew that the rose in her hand and all the glad welcome shining in her eyes were for him only; and because this was the one personal tribute to him, amid all the general gratulations, he felt something of an answering elation. Here was balm for his wounded heart — here was something that might belong to him. But even as she leaned over the rail to toss him the flower, there came a sudden



revulsion of feeling. His resolution of forgetfulness, made a moment ago, was itself forgotten; for, as by some magician's trick, the grandstand with its eager occupant faded away, and in its place there loomed up in his fancy the tall fluted columns of a wide veranda; and between the columns stood a girl with the sunset glowing over her and the evening shadows at her feet, making a picture for the brush of a master. About her red mouth the dimples rioted, and in her wonderful dark eyes was a dare as she held out to him a knot of shining gray ribbon. "Will you wear this?"

So vivid was the vision that the procession, with its banners and music, was utterly unheeded; his fingers slackened on the rein, and his horse kept its place in the line only from force of habit and training. But the next moment something struck him lightly on the breast, shattering his dream. It was the rose from the grandstand, and the girl, dropping the flag upon the rail, was leaning toward him with outstretched arms, all her face speaking her welcome. Again there came the comforting knowledge of being remembered, of being first in some one's thought.

His heart was sick with loneliness, his hurt pride, perhaps, calling for a salve. That other girl of his vision was nothing to him, could never be anything; she had told him so, and had emphasized the assertion by the long silence which he had in vain

begged her to break. Even now she might be her cousin's wife; already the lips for whose smile he had so often watched, might be another man's to kiss. But here before him was no repulse; in those blue eyes above him were welcome and invitation. In all the wide world, here was the one person who had separated him from the host about him, had thought with tenderness of his return, had set him in a niche of his own with no rival, no reservation.

"To-night!" he cried up to her; and then, as she read the motion of his lips, the procession had swept him by.

But the white rose was trampled in the dust.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HOME-COMING

After the storm, the calm,
After the drum-roll, the silence — K.

IT SEEMED strange not to be watching for war news after the long years of anxious stress. The usages of peace were so new that it was difficult to settle into them; the whole South lay as one but just awakened from a bad dream, and waiting to make sure there would be no return of the haunting vision.

From the April morning when the news of Lee's surrender had come, Cicely watched the big road with feverish impatience. No Gheber ever looked to the East more yearningly for his sun-god than did she for her father.

"Oh, mammy," she cried one morning, dropping down on the rear porch step at the old woman's feet, as she sat knitting in the soft May sunshine, "Oh, mammy, to think that after all I am to see him again! God was good, so good to leave me all of my dearest ones."

"Yes, honey, sho' was kine er Prov'dence ter lebe you marster an' Mars Guy an' Mars Ray, all three."

But the girl said again under her breath: "*All* of them — I said *all*."

Presently the old woman added: "But, missy, you gotter tek keer Mars Ray or de feber gwine git 'im ergin. Sum'ow I doan zackly lak dat white look he got 'bout de gills."

Cicely sat up instantly, alert and anxious, as she always was at any suggestion of a change in Ray; but Minna, who was holding the door open for Grandma Houston, laughed gayly.

"Gills, mammy? Why you talk as if Ray were some species of gallinaceous creature."

"Now, Miss Minna, you knows I never said nuthin' lak dat 'bout Mars Ray. I ain neber helt wid callin' names; leastways, not my own white folks."

Again Minna laughed, but Grandma Houston, seeing the old negro's perplexity, explained the term.

"Huh!" sniffed mammy, "mighty big name fer jes' er chick'n."

Then grandma turned to the laughing girl: "Minna, my dear, I am glad to know that you paid so much attention to your natural history, but in conversing with illiterate persons it is well not to be so anxious to display your superior knowledge."

"Yes, grandma; hereafter when I am in Africa, so to say, I will talk as the Africans."

The old lady looked at her sharply: "For the

life of me, I cannot understand where you got this knack of answering back. No true Houston ever before presumed so to treat an elder."

"I am sorry not to be a true Houston, and I suppose that answering back must be an acquired habit, since it is not a trait of heredity. But I am sure I beg you ten thousand pardons, grandma, for anything I may have said."

The pretty penitence of the last sentence deceived and disarmed the old lady: "Well, I must say you have some Houston good qualities — humility in confessing a fault, for instance. My mother always taught her children that the ability to acknowledge one's self in the wrong was one of the foundation stones of good character."

Minna's eyes danced, but she said with that same beautiful mock humility: "And of course, grandma, you always followed out your mother's precept."

The old head went up with a haughty superiority: "Had the occasion ever arisen I would have done so."

"Of course; that was what I meant — had you ever been in the wrong."

But this time something in the voice caught the older woman's attention; she adjusted her glasses and looked the girl over carefully. Minna, with demure eyes and a prunes-and-prisms mouth might have been posing for a statue of Innocence. Molli-

fied, the old lady was about to turn away when a paper stuck in the girl's belt caught her eye.

"Is that a bible verse for the day, or some household recipe you are caring for so assiduously?"

"This? Oh, this is a letter from Terry," Minna answered unguardedly, and then could have bitten her tongue out for pure vexation.

"Terry? — and pray, who is *Terry*!"

Cicely, shaking with silent laughter, turned her head as it rested on mammy's knee, waiting to hear Minna fence. But for once she met the issue in hand fairly.

"Terry, Grandma Houston, is Major Bailey's sergeant."

"The young Irish person who escorted Cicely and Lena home, and who made such really deferential bows?"

"Yes, grandma; and who had such perfectly beautiful blue eyes," glowed the girl. Grandma adjusted her glasses a second time for a closer look at the young face. "I see. And how often have you met him?"

"Only three times, but ——"

"Three meetings scarcely justifies this astounding tone of familiarity."

"Yes, but the conditions of those three made them as good as a dozen."

"And may I ask those conditions?"

"Well — well, you see there was no one else pres-

ent to distract my thoughts; they were all concentrated in just that one channel. Oh, yes, indeed; three complete absorptions are equal any time to a dozen ordinary visits, with other people breaking in and claiming part of your attention. There wasn't anything for me to do but listen to Terry, and so — and so ——”

The girl's glib tongue was leaving the old lady bewildered. “And so you call him *Terry*, and write to him?”

“Y-e-s, Grandma Houston.”

“Well, I will see what this Irish person writes you about,” she stretched out her hand imperiously for the letter. “Young girls need chaperonage in such matters. In my day and time ——”

She got no farther. The girl was straightening her cap ribbons with a charmingly caressing touch: “In your day and time, dear grandma, you would have understood perfectly my position, for you must have had scores of lovers writing you adoring letters. You were pretty enough to set the whole country by the ears. Didn't that friend who wrote you the verses in the jewel case up stairs often tell you so?”

Cicely always loved to recall the change that came momentarily over the proud old face. It was as if an angel's wing had brushed it in passing, sweeping away the accumulated lines and traces of more than half a century. The old woman's

face faded away, and in its place were a girl's misty eyes and smiling lips, thrown back as by some mighty reflection of the powerful lens of the years.

So does a woman go back, over the rocks of sorrow or through the pitfalls of sin, to her first romance; so does she always recall that first lover who said to her: "*You* are the one woman!"

Then the angel was gone, the girl-eyes had faded; and the gold-headed cane struck the floor sharply: "Minna, another of your un-Houston traits is your propensity to flatter. Remember what the psalmist said about deceitful lips."

"I do not recall the verse, but I will look it up, grandma. But, dear me! I have so many and such grievous faults that I fear I shall never learn to be a true Houston. However, I realize it is my own incomparable loss."

She held the door open with dutiful attention while her grandma, who had risen, passed in; then when it was closed she threw herself beside Cicely on the step with a delicious gurgle of laughter.

"I would simply have died had she insisted on reading Terry's letter, for it is so sweet it is a marvel the pages don't stick together — the 'dears' and 'sweets' and 'mavourneens' chase each other from line to line like a game of 'ring-a-round-Rosy.' And, oh, Cicely, listen! — he says here that he will

be at Pinehurst in a week, and Guy is coming with him, and maybe Joe Howell."

"Guy!" Cicely caught a deep breath of joy, then looked at the radiant face beside her: "Joe Howell and the sergeant together? That sounds to me like a complication."

Minna's eyes narrowed to slits of twinkling light; "Ah, Cicely, I may not know the usages of a 'true Houston' (which seems to be synonymous with the Lord's elect) but I do know that no true daughter of Eve ever objects to a complication of two lovers at a time."

"Then I suppose I am of some obscure collateral branch and not a lineal descendant of the first mother, for I confess such a situation has no attraction for me."

"Yes, when it comes to real Eve-qualities, you and Lena are both a species of in-laws," gurgled Minna, the letter open on her knee.

But after all it was only the sergeant who came with Guy at the end of the week, for Joe, divining how things stood with his old sweetheart, stopped at his home place and refused to be exhibited at her chariot wheels for the edification of his successful rival. If Minna felt any disappointment McHenry's ardently resumed wooing left her no time to indulge it.

"Oh, Guy, home again, safe — without so much as

a scratch!" Cicely cried, pushing him away at arm's length for a better view.

"No, not a scratch," he answered, a trifle disgusted.

"Why, you are not sorry?"

"Oh, of course I didn't *want* to be wounded, but a scar is a good witness for a soldier. Ray and McHenry will have some proof of their prowess to show the next generation, while I'll have to rely on my word that I was in the scrimmage."

"Well, there'll be plenty of us to corroborate your story," laughed Ray, "and I can tell you from experience, old fellow, that a wound, in a personal way, is a very trying evidence."

"Well, at least it doesn't bear false witness. However, the Yankees did not take advantage of their opportunities to shoot me, and I am certainly glad to be at home again."

"And father?" asked Cicely.

"Our parole was ahead of his. He will be here as soon as possible. Say, Sis, I think it is a grinning shame that Minna has thrown Joe over after all these years of being sweethearts."

"Well, you know Minna could not marry all the boys with whom she has been sweethearts."

"My, but she's the little jilt! Why, Ed Miles carried a letter in his pocket two years in which she besought him not to let the 'Philistine Yankees shoot him,' and saying how she would look at a

certain star every night and pray for his safe return. He took that to mean pretty near an engagement."

Cicely laughed: "Oh, Guy, every girl in the South has probably prayed that way for a dozen soldiers."

Mammy looked the young fellow over critically. He had been such a sturdy chap in nursery days: "Huh! I gwine right in de kitchin an' mek you some hot biscuit, honey. 'Pears ter me lak Gen'ul Wheeler did'en gi' y'all much ter eat; you done got er whole sight longer, and not er mite wider."

"I am longer, mammy," he answered; then, solemnly drawing his hand across his throat, "and I'm hollow up to here."

"Fo de Lord, chile! Come right 'long in de pantry; you ain got time ter wait fer dem biscuit ter bake."

McHenry remained only two days at Pinehurst: "It is only a touch-and-go visit, mavourneen, to make sure of you and to ask Mrs. Houston's permission to call her grandma. There's much to be done in Savannah, and my law partner and I must start in with the new order of things. The sooner I go now, the sooner I'll come back for you for good."

Minna pouted: "Oh, suit yourself. I shall not be lonely—the Howell place is only three miles from here, and as soon as Joe hears you are gone ——"

He looked at her with such a blaze in his blue eyes that she caught her breath in a quick delight: "Don't try any of your jealousy-making pranks on me, Minna: the Irish in me won't stand for it."

"Oh, I expect there are a good many things the Irish in you will have to get used to standing," but she slipped her hand in his with a smile.

Guy at once took upon himself the direction of farm affairs, relieving Cicely of much anxiety and doubt. But there was plenty to do in the house, for only mammy and Jake remained of the dozen servants who had been always at beck and call. All over the whole South it was the same way; shoulders were bearing unusual burdens, beautiful white hands were being roughened by undreamed-of labour. The younger people took this with a certain amount of stoical resignation; but women of Grandma Houston's generation were appalled.

"To think of my grandson *ploughing*," she would say, watching Guy follow Jake to the field, "or my granddaughter obliged to wash the dishes from my table! As sure as there is justice in heaven, Mr. Lincoln will answer for this."

"Why do you single President Lincoln out from all the other men who helped to bring on the war?" asked Cicely, laying out the silver she has been polishing. "His cabinet had its full share of responsibility; he could not have brought all opinions into submission."

"And why not? He was the head and should have controlled the others; that is a ruler's duty. *I* had differences of opinion in my domestic arrangements, but never any open rebellion — of course not. Why could not Mr. Lincoln have managed the government as I managed my household?"

"And if he had, we would have had an autocracy, not a republic," Cicely whispered over her shoulder to Ray in his invalid chair by the window, while the old woman's cane marked her exit with its tapping.

"Yes, and things would have been pretty bad unless we had had a prime minister like you to interpret the laws and stand between the ruler and the ruled," he answered in the same gay mood. "But, Cicely, aren't you nearly through with those interminable spoons? I get envious of the time you give them."

She smiled at him brightly: "I have just three more, then I am coming to read to you."

"I do not wish to be read to to-day; I wish to talk about ourselves and our marriage."

She nodded without looking up: "Just two more spoons, and I'll be with you."

In anxious consultation with Guy, in reading to and caring for Ray, and in numberless household tasks the May days went by for Cicely. The poultry yard and the vegetable garden made the

problem of feeding the big family less difficult than in the winter; but always there was something else to be done, some demand upon time or sympathy to be met and answered. Grandma Houston often sighed at the gravity of the young face. The strain of the past year had been harder than the girl herself realized.

"If father would only come," she often sighed.

But it was not until one morning in June that, opening the front door to let in the first sunlight, she found herself suddenly seized in the arms of a tall, bearded man, and swung off her feet.

"Cicely, my little girl — my little girl! Thank God for a sight of you."

"Father! — Oh, father, father!"

She could say only that, though in her mind were a hundred endearing phrases; but in that one exclamation she spoke her gratitude for his return after all the long, hard months of separation and privation and peril for both of them; and in it, too, she put away for the first time the heavy responsibility that had fallen on her young shoulders that memorable day when Sherman's order of expulsion from Atlanta had been read to the bewildered women in Mrs. Clinch's parlour.

"Father! — Oh, father, father!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A WEDDING AND A VISITOR

Happy they, the happiest of their kind,
Whom gentle stars unite — Thomson's Seasons.

THE autumn sun lay golden over the wide acres of Pinehurst, some of them whitening with the cotton yield, but many more turned into sumptuous fields of cloth-of-gold by the unrestrained glories of rudbeckia and golden-rod. This was the negroes' first season of exemption from compulsory labour, and it would scarcely have been within the pale of nature for them not to have caught at the novel experience. The result was an anarchy of weeds where hitherto prolific crops had been harvested, and an idle tenantry living precariously and vicariously, and waiting for the government to fulfil its promise of lands and live stock.

The long summer had been full of new experiences, of uncertainties and hardships. Many of the Pinehurst guests had gone away to their homes, or rather to make new ones where the old had stood, and the house seemed strangely silent. With the hot weather, Ray, beginning to limp about the

house, had succumbed to a second fever, and in its grip he had weakened like a child; so that in the first September days, when his mother had taken the children to join their father in Atlanta, he had been left behind, and Lena and Cicely still waited upon him. The fever, seizing upon his weakest point, left its mark on the leg that had been broken by a Union bullet, and he was forced to go upon crutches. Often Cicely, hearing the sound of those crutches, turned away to hide the tears that filled her eyes; but one day he caught her with them still upon her lashes:

"I urged you to go to the war," she said, in answer to his anxious look. "I wrote you that it would be like shirking for you and Guy to stay with your books and turn a deaf ear to the South's call for troops; and so — and so those crutches seem to upbraid me."

"But would you have loved me if I had not gone — if I had shirked at home?"

"No; oh, no!"

"Then I am quite reconciled to the crutches. Doctor Watson says that in time I can discard them; I have only to be patient and avoid a strain. My greatest hardship is that I cannot go actively about straightening out my affairs that I may ask you to go away to Atlanta with me. The sight of McHenry's happiness and all these preparations have put notions into my own head."

For to-morrow was to be a wedding day. McHenry's impatience had outstripped the growth of his law practice, and Minna — urgently persuaded — had at last agreed that "starvation was not so bad if it was done in pairs"; and so he was coming with the preacher and the license; and Pinehurst was making ready for a little festival. There was the sound of the egg-beater in the kitchen and of the cream-whip in the pantry, and from the kitchen came spicy odours that drew the children as a magnet draws needles.

"Oh, me-my!" sighed Marie, as she licked a spoon, or sampled the oven's tempting output, "Oh, me-my, I wish somebody'd get married every day!"

"Humph!" grunted Dick, with his mouth full of citron, "there ain't 'nough folks to go 'round that long."

"Well, anyhow, there's Cicely an' Unc' Ray, an' me an' Tommy," was the confident answer.

Very pretty and piquant Minna looked the next morning when Cicely and Lena brought her into the upper hall for the family's inspection after robing her for the wedding ceremony. There had been no money to send to Savannah for the bridal dress of the girl's dreams, but the cedar chest in the garret had given up an exquisite treasure in the shape of a white satin gown made for that great-great-aunt who had been jilted by her French lover.

There was a rent in one width where a Federal forager had jabbed his bayonet into the chest and speared out the contents in search of hidden jewels or plate that never-to-be-forgotten day of search a year ago. But nobody objected to the darn Minna's deft needle made in the shining fabric, for it seemed of a piece with the other greater scars of the war.

"I would not wear it for the world," shuddered Lena, straightening the soft folds, deep ivory with the touch of time.

"Why not?"

"Oh, it might bring some of that same old sad luck; or the owner might come back to claim it."

"Nonsense! It was made for a wedding, and it ought to accomplish its destiny. I think that other bride-that-never-was would be glad if she could know of its happy use, and by such a pretty bride, too," declared Cicely, laying a spray of fresh orange blossoms against the beautiful old dress.

Grandma Houston peered at it through her glasses, for she remembered the owner who had kept that vacant-eyed vigil beside the rose-room window. "Under the circumstances it was proper to use it," she said with an autocratic finality, "for up to this time no true Houston had ever been married in anything but satin."

"I did not cut it any shorter, Cicely; just turned up the hem, so it will be here ready for your own

wedding," laughed Minna, with a sly little wink over at Ray; "unless you think the old thing will get giddy with two such functions."

"I was not speaking of my own wedding; that is too far off to consider. And, Minna, are you going to pick up all of Sergeant McHenry's bad habits as quickly as you picked up that wicked little wink?"

But when the other girls went back to Minna's room and she would have followed, Ray caught her hand: "Cicely, why do you say your wedding is too far off to talk about?"

"Because of many things — father and grandma both need me."

"And do not I need you too?"

She smiled at him enigmatically: "Not much; Lena is a better nurse than I am." Then she went quickly, leaving him mystified. What did she mean? Was it possible that she was jealous of his dependence on Lena? For he was dependant on her; nobody did anything for him half so well, nobody thought so constantly of his comfort and pleasure. He made hourly demands upon her time and her patience, and he had never found her slow or unwilling to assist him or to humour his whims. But — Cicely! — why that was ridiculous!

Major Bailey came with the bridegroom, and while the guests were arriving, Cicely, true to her promise of the spring time, showed him the rose-room.

"I did not deceive you in act that night last winter; the yellow room is really considered the haunted chamber, and that was what you asked to see."

"I guessed something was behind that wardrobe when you made no offer to have me move it. It was certainly a pretty nest in which to hide your bird," he said, glancing about at the quaint furniture and silken draperies. "It is a thousand wonders Sherman's foragers did not discover and spoil it."

"They were in the house only that one day, and were too much taken up with the attic, where the accumulation of boxes and chests is stored. They thought we had hidden our jewels and silver among that rubbish."

"And Captain Fairlee interrupted the search. He was a soldier worthy his West Point training; and there were others like him in that invading army. I knew some of those officers personally, and they were fine fellows — under the wrong influence. Is Fairlee still with his company?"

"I do not know."

"It is not possible he has not written you since he left?"

"Yes; but not since evacuating Savannah."

"That is nine months ago." He came close to her and looked deep into her eyes: "So you made your choice, and it is Ray?" he said smiling. But

if he expected to see her eyes light up or droop with embarrassment, he was disappointed; she looked at him without a trace of emotion, and somehow he understood. He suddenly took her unresisting hand as her father might have done: "Cicely, child, did I advise you against your heart? Was it Fairlee after all? Is this beautiful room to be a sacrificial altar for the love blood of the women of your race?"

"You have a fantastic way of putting things, Major Bailey."

"Your heart chose one, your judgment the other?"

"I have not said so."

He held her hand closer: "Child, child! you must not sacrifice yourself. It would be a crime."

"Is it such a sacrifice to marry a man who has loved one all of one's life — who is kind and brave and true?"

He looked at her in silence, noting the shadow that had come to her eyes since their last meeting: "We have been together in two very close places, and so the understanding between us is clearer than years of ordinary acquaintance could have made it. May I presume upon this to ask you a question?"

She hesitated a moment, then answered: "Yes, for I trust your discretion."

"Does Ray know?"

Her eyes went up to his with an odd flash: "There is nothing for Ray to know."

"I think there is. I do not believe he would hold you to your word if he did."

"Major Bailey — I think you *are* presuming upon our friendship."

"If so, I apologize." Then presently his bronzed face grew tender, almost boyishly bashful: "I am going to presume again: this time upon your patience — but I might as well say it, even if it seems hopeless. You turned my head last winter, and I have never forgotten you. I came here to-day principally because I knew I would see you again. Child, I could rejoice at your marriage to a younger man whom you loved, for that would mean your best happiness; but — but if there is to be a sacrifice, may I not come into the race ——"

She was smiling up at him: "You told me yourself the difference in our ages, and said you were too old to ——"

"Run after you? Yes; but I also said I was too old to run away from you. Fate has brought me to you again;" and then that twinkle she remembered so well came into his eyes, softened a little perhaps, "and if it is to be a sacrifice, it would be wiser to choose an old man; your days of bondage would be fewer."

"Days of bondage! Would you want a wife

who would gamble on the shortness of your life for her happiness and freedom?"

"But, listen ——"

"Hush, we are talking nonsense; here comes father. Move a little this way so as to get the best light on my name-aunt's portrait. Do you think I am like her? Father, Major Bailey thinks I am like Aunt Cicely."

"In more ways than one," the old major said, under his breath, then gave her his arm down the stair.

The wedding in the long drawing-room was very pretty. A few neighbours augmented the home circle, among them Joe Howell, looking black enough to satisfy even the bride's exacting taste in such matters.

"Well, this wedding is a result of the war, Mc-Henry," said Mr. Houston after the ceremony.

"Yes, and I am so much of a Christian with happiness that I find myself forgiving the North for fighting us. If it had not been for the war I would never have met Minna mavourneen, but would have drifted along and married a squab of a girl who wanted me down in the south country. Don't be jealous, colleen," he called up to her as she turned on the stair at his words. "I did not say that I wanted her, it was the other way; and surely you cannot blame her for her preference."

"Certainly not. I am glad to know that I was

not the only woman in the country with a perverted taste," but she softened her retort by the kiss she blew him.

Up stairs, with the unlaced bridal satin slipping to her knees, she put her arms suddenly about Cicely's waist.

"Cicely, I never told you before, but I have had two letters from Captain Fairlee."

Cicely stared: "From Captain Fairlee?"

"Yes; one in June, asking if Ray had recovered from his wound. The other came about a fortnight ago. He asked if you and Ray had been married. I wrote him no, and I thought it would be a mistake if the marriage ever took place, for Lena loved Ray, and —! For heaven's sake, Cicely, don't look at me like that; it was not a crime to write him the truth."

"But it was something very like a crime to betray your friend's secret."

"It is not so much a secret as you imagine. I think Captain Fairlee already suspected, and Grandma Houston has guessed it. That is why she was so anxious for Lena to go away to Atlanta with Aunt MacIntosh. Yesterday she told me I must invite Lena to Savannah as soon as Terry and I were settled; but I have a better plan."

"What is that?"

Minna took her boldly by the shoulders and looked her in the face: "To ask you instead, and

leave Lena and Ray to work out their problem for themselves.

Lena and Ray to work out their problem! Cicely caught her breath at the daring sweep of the girl's meaning, then went quietly on with the hooks of the dress: "There is no problem for Lena and Ray to solve; you have let your imagination run away with you! What else did Captain Fairlee say?"

"Not much; the letter is here in the drawer, I left it for you. I wanted him at my wedding, but of course — there is Terry calling — yes, yes, I am coming!"

Then she caught her cousin in a quick embrace: "Cicely, Major Bailey looks awfully big-eyed and sad; what has he been saying to you?"

"That you are a great tactician, and that the campaign ahead of Sergeant McHenry will be as strenuous as any General Sherman ever entailed on him, and as barren of victory," laughed Cicely.

Minna grimaced in the major's direction: "He is a little old, but I believe he'd do for something more than just to count and tell your grandchildren about, if you'd only give up thinking of Ray! I shall tell the major not to despair, and I shall write Captain ——"

"You will not write Captain Fairlee anything."

"Oh, very well; I was only going to tell him not to quit the service before he marries, so he can have

that military wedding we talked about. He wrote me in June that he had met that first sweetheart in Washington, and that her eyes were blue. I thought it quite a hopeful sign that he could remember the colour; he had forgotten it before! There is Terry calling again. Oh, Cicely! I am going to manage him so beautifully, and all for his good, for it is the managed men who are happiest."

"Come on!" Ray and Guy were shouting from below. "We have old shoes enough for your good luck, but mammy will not spare us much rice, even for a bride."

Major Bailey was bending over Cicely's hand when McHenry came up to say good-by: "Congratulate him before you let him go, Cousin Cicely," he said, for he had immediately adopted and kissed all of Minna's female relatives. "Congratulate him for I have the finest cousin down in Savannah ever imported from old Ireland. She's not so young as she was twenty years ago, but she's as sound and sweet as a peach in August. The major is a flinty-hearted old bachelor, with never a thought for a woman, but when he sees the Irish eyes of Cousin Nora and hears the sweet Irish tongue of her — for she never left the country without kissing the blarney stone, — he will melt like an icicle in the sun. I'll just invite you to the wedding — save time."

Cicely's eyes glinted upward: "He may be too old to run after her." And the major laughed.

"No necessity for that," declared McHenry. "When I finish telling her all his noble traits and splendid military deeds, she'll run after him. All I've got to do is to sic her on."

The major's hand went to his heart as he bent his gray head: "I escaped Butler and Sherman, both of whom vowed to catch me; but no doubt Cousin Nora's tactics are superior. Behold me a perspective benedict, Miss Houston."

Then there were cries of good luck and good-by, a fusillade of old shoes and slippers with a scant sprinkling of rice, the throwing of the bride's bouquet to be caught by the next bride-to-be, and the new husband and wife, attended by Major Bailey and a few others on horseback, went down the avenue and out into the great world where the twin angels of joy and sorrow are forever troubling the waters of life. But to the hearts that love and trust even the sorrowful messenger has wings of silver.

After all the bridal guests were gone the house seemed very lonely. Of the refugees of the winter before, there now remained at Pinehurst only Aunt Hinton and Lena. Ray would join his mother in Atlanta as soon as he was sufficiently strong; but the other two would remain indefinitely, for their home was gone, and although they might

have lived in one of the farm cabins, as hundreds of families through the South were doing, Mr. Houston would not hear of it. The house and the heart of Pinehurst were surely big enough to shelter the two lonely women.

After the last of the wedding guests had said good-by, Cicely went up stairs and found the letter Minna had left in the drawer. There was very little in it beyond the question concerning herself of which Minna had told; no smallest reference to the blue-eyed girl who had met him in Washington. But his silence might have no special significance; he would scarcely discuss his closest affairs with a girl who had been only a passing acquaintance. The date was two weeks ago, from his old Connecticut home; that was all she could learn even of his whereabouts. She put the letter away finally and went down stairs, depressed, she told herself, by the stillness of the house after the morning's gay stir. Her father and Guy had ridden away to the fields; Grandma Houston and Aunt Hinton were talking over the wedding in the latter's room, and did not ask her to join them. In the library she found Lena reading to Ray, and although she stood some moments in the door, they were too much absorbed in their book to notice her; so she went in search of mammy. But by the rear porch Bess was cropping grass; here was her best companion. She whistled to the mare and put the

saddle on her, petting her with soft strokes and pretty names. Many pleasure rides would have been an exaction on the beautiful animal who had to do her share of the farm work, but to-day had been a holiday because of the wedding, and the creature was fresh and rested. Cicely did not return for a riding skirt, but with Ray's soldier cap on her dark braids went galloping down the avenue and out into the public road. A recent rain had washed the way-side weeds and bushes clean of dust, a fleet of white cloud-ships was sailing the waveless upper deep, a mocking-bird gurgled and trilled and dipped and careened upon a swaying limb of the hedge, and along with the resinous breath of the pines the air had a far-off promise of frost.

As the mare swept her onward, the loneliness lifted from her heart and there came in its place the exhilaration such exercise always brought her. When the fields were left behind and she came to the belt of pines that skirted the plantation, she slackened her pace. She loved the pines; always their song had a haunting fascination for her. In it she heard the sorrow of the whole universe—the hoarse breathing of weary ones, the tremulous cry of lonely, waiting hearts, the long wail of the utterly lost. Always she was trying to read the mysteries it whispered wordlessly. As a child she had fancied that the branches were haunted by

the spirits of those who had never known joy, but who had wept the tears of the world. They soothed her now with their soft monotony, so that she ceased to think of the wedding, of Fairlee's letter, or of Ray, and rode home keenly alive to the objects and movements about her — the rank growth of the untilled fields, the scurry of a rabbit through the way-side weeds, the red-and-bronze flash of a pair of grosbeaks among the green of the hedging shrubs; so that when she reached the house the loneliness and irritation of the hour before were gone, and in their place was a deep calm of spirit. There was a strange horse at the rack, a belated wedding guest, perhaps; and in the hall, mammy told her that a gentleman was waiting in the parlour.

"Did he wish to see father?"

"He want ter see ev'eybody. Yo' pa ain come back frum de fiel' yit."

So with her riding whip in her hand and that Confederate cap perched jauntily on her dark braids, Cicely stepped into the room that was still fragrant with the wedding garlands. Through the open windows the October breeze was blowing the curtains in long, lazy, lacy ripples; and from one of these windows that overlooked the garden, a man came to meet her with glad eyes and eager, outstretched hands.



CHAPTER XXIV

THE BELATED WEDDING GUEST

I shall never be friends with roses again,
I shall hate sweet music my whole life long — Swinburne.

MISS HOUSTON — Cicely!"
"Captain Fairlee!"

He had her hand in his, pressing it against his breast, and his eyes searched her face, holding each dear feature in a momentary glance of gladness: "God, but it is good to see you!"

"Where did you come from? Did you spring up from the earth, or did the winds bring you?" She heard the little quaver of joy in her own voice, and stopped, lest he, too, should catch it.

"From home, as fast as sails would bring me to Savannah; thence on horseback here. Did you not know that Miss Minna invited me to her wedding?"

"She did not tell me. But you should have come earlier; the wedding was this morning."

"Yes; Mammy Milly tells me I am too late for that, but if you will only say I am welcome I will not mind so much — for it was to see you that I really came."

THE BELATED WEDDING GUEST 341

"Father will be glad to meet and welcome the man who saved him his home. He has often wished to do so."

"And you?"

She tried to draw her hand away, but he held it close: "No, no; let me keep it a moment. You are not Raymond Clinch's wife, you are still Cicely Houston, so there is no harm."

But she dared not leave it there any longer, lest he feel how she was beginning to tremble. "Let us find seats."

"Not until I hear whether you yourself have any welcome for me."

"My friends are always most welcome to Pinehurst — and I certainly count you my friend."

"Thank you — though to my heart 'friend' seems a very cold word."

He led her to a divan near one of the windows at the far end of the room, and they sat down.

"Miss Minna said October the tenth, and somehow I thought of the time as to-night."

"It had to be a morning wedding because the railroad is not yet rebuilt, and the journey by vehicle is long to Savannah."

"As I found. I should have reached here hours ago, but Ben knew the swamp route better than the highways, and we lost our bearings this time," he said with a smile, recalling that other journey

with the negro guide to the city then held by the Union army.

"You brought Ben with you?"

"Yes; he was homesick to come, and I—I was heartsick! Did you ever think how cruel it was of you to leave me all those long months without news of you?"

"There was nothing to tell you."

"Nothing? Did you not eat, sleep, talk, ride, see your friends? The smallest thought would have been as a golden text to me."

She had overcome that quiver of her nerves, and answered lightly: "I always sleep well, having a clear conscience; and our bills of fare in the South these days could not possibly interest any one."

But he was not in a mood to jest: "I could not but believe you would answer my last letter, it seemed impossible that you should not! Can you imagine even faintly the bitterness of my disappointment when Ben returned without so much as a message?"

She looked up quickly: "He did not wait for an answer." The next moment she could have bitten her tongue for the words.

"What do you mean?" He had caught at her hand and was bending so close that their shoulders touched. She drew away toward the end of the divan.

"Just what I say—he was gone back to you

before the letter reached me. There was no way for me to send an answer, for I did not know your address." Then she added quickly, seeing the light kindling in his eyes: "But it could have made no possible difference. I had nothing to say except to congratulate you on the solution of the problem with Kilpatrick as to my escape."

"Only that — after that ride through the night, after——"

She had glanced out of the near-by window; Ray was pacing up and down the garden path, leaning heavily on his crutch. A shadow of gravity fell over her face: "Only that — after anything that happened."

He saw the shadow on her brow, but not the cause. "You meant what you said then? You — you did care — a little? You were not merely cajoling me into a hasty flight?"

She had taken the cap from her head and now turned it slowly in her hand: "Is it quite generous in you to hold me to what I said in a — a moment of excitement?"

"Yes; for it is in moments like that that we speak truly, and it was those words that brought me back on this visit. Listen: when I wrote you that letter in February I had given you up. I felt the futility of striving to win you against your conscience and your prejudice, for I knew that your conscience was enlisted on your cousin's

side, and your prejudice against my uniform. The latter alone I might have overcome; but, joined with the former, it seemed hopeless."

He paused, and she nodded slowly: "You were right; it was hopeless."

"But," he continued, "there came a time when I saw things differently. The day of the great military parade, as I rode with my company down Pennsylvania Avenue, a girl threw me a rose, a girl I had known before. I was heart-hungry in that vast throng of strangers, and to know that one smile was meant for me individually was like a soothing touch on an aching wound. That night I went to see the girl at her hotel, determined to fill my empty life with new hopes, new interests that should converge about her. But——" he hesitated and broke off.

"Well?" she said, but almost under her breath.

"But when I stood under the chandelier with her and looked into her eyes, I knew it was useless — I could never do it. Do you wish to know why?"

"Yes, if you wish to tell me."

"Because when I held her hand, it was your hand I thought of; because it was not her blue eyes but your dark ones I seemed to see! The intangible image of you blotted out the real girl before me. I was almost afraid to speak her name lest I say 'Cicely' instead."

She stirred restlessly, her bosom heaving, but she did not speak. After a moment he went on:

"It was a trying hour; I went there to ask her love, and ended by telling her of my love for you."

She thought a moment of that other girl, reading something deeper than Fairlee's words, and a great pity stirred her. At what frightful cross-purposes fate had played with five human hearts. How far astray the strands of love had been blown in the frightful war blasts that had swept the land! Presently she said:

"You should not have told her of me; it precludes your ever asking her, and by-and-by you will wish ——"

"There is to be no by-and-by for her and me. She married last week a man who has loved her from childhood."

Was there a strain of relief in the breath she drew? She hated herself for the thought; if he could have loved this other girl, two of the five aching hearts would have been comforted. She leaned to a table and plucked a blossom from a vase of the bridal decorations, and studied the golden heart of it between the shell-pink petals. He watched her a moment, noting the pure line of her profile, the fine moulding of lip and chin, the faint shadow the lashes made on her smooth cheek, the little tendrils of hair that broke away from her smooth braids and curled about her



brow. Was ever a face so fashioned for a man's loving!

"I thought of course your marriage would take place as soon as Lieutenant Clinch was up from his wound," he went on presently, "and there were even days when I asked myself, with a torture of jealousy: 'Is this the wedding day, does this sun see her lost to me forever?' Finally I could stand the suspense no longer, and wrote to Miss Minna."

"She told me of the letter this morning as she was leaving. It was very wrong of her to mention Lena."

"I knew Lena's secret already — the shy little wild flower! For her sake and my own I would to God He had given her her heart's desire and left me mine!" He got up abruptly and walked over to the window, but Ray had passed the corner, and only the flowers nodded at him with multi-coloured heads. A few moments he stood there, while the girl on the divan watched him with unshadowed eyes. The only change in him seemed the healthful bronze of his cheek and the sureness and vigour of movement of his straight, sinewy figure.

"Your letter to Minna was dated from your Connecticut home," she said, when he had returned to his seat.

"Yes; I have resigned my commission, and am now only an American citizen. My military career

THE BELATED WEDDING GUEST 347

was the result of education, not the choice of my maturer years — though, of course, I should have enlisted in the war, believing in the Union as I did.”

“I am glad to see you in civilian dress,” she said, smiling a little.

“But you are still in the uniform of Dixie,” he replied, touching the cap she had worn. “You wore that when I saw you last.”

“That night on which you saved me from Kilpatrick.”

“And on which you afterward saved me from Major Bailey. We managed to keep our accounts on that score pretty evenly balanced.”

“Yes,” she said slowly, “we have saved each other and been each other’s prisoner.”

“You were my prisoner for just five hours,” but his eyes glowed with the happy memory. “And this brings us back to what I said awhile ago. The words you spoke at the end of that sweet captivity are my reason for being here now.”

“You are going to remind me again of those hasty words?” she moved sharply, wishing some one would come and interrupt this dangerous talk before the inevitable climax.

“Yes,” he answered steadily; “for although Miss Minna’s invitation gave me the pretext for this visit, I should not have come had it not been for those last words under the starlight, with the

sound of Major Bailey's galloping troopers in our ears."

"Captain Fairlee, I repudiate those words."

The delicate flower she held was shriven of its petals by her shaking fingers.

"You cannot, for in such moments the heart speaks, not the lips only. You did care for me, that was why you sent me away, why you saved me. You cannot look into my eyes and deny it. Can you?"

She tried to look up, to speak the negative words, but the lashes would not lift, and the denial died on her red lips. She sat beside him flushing, trembling, helpless.

"Cicely, beloved!"

But she quickly put away the arms that would have caught her to his breast, for though her heart was rebel to her promise and longed for the love of his, yet her loyalty of purpose was unshaken. In her glance was something of the fighting light that he remembered from other days. He drew back, rebuked. Every true man knows when he reaches the circle a woman draws about her womanliness.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "but in heaven's name don't tempt me again with a tremble of the lips like that!" He bent forward, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands, his whole frame shaking with emotion. In the girl's heart was a

THE BELATED WEDDING GUEST 349

suffocating pain that held her speechless, a hot rebellion against fate that sent her nails biting into her pink palms. Why should she sacrifice herself and this man beside her for her father's involuntary debt of gratitude? Then the conviction came that it was not her father's debt only, but her own truth that was at stake; that if she refused to break this man's heart, she would crush the hope of the one limping out yonder among the roses. One way or another it was to be a sacrifice. Her father expected her to marry Ray; he would oppose violently any thought of her union with a man who had fought against the South in her struggle for liberty. And she, too, had the pride of her own sectional patriotism. She had sent Ray out to fight for the cause that was lost, and he had come back stricken in strength. Could she set him adrift, and choose in his stead one of the victors against whom he had striven? The thought helped to steady her nerves, so that presently when Fairlee lifted his head from his hands she was no longer trembling.

"It scarcely seems worth while to go on with my reason for coming here," he said; "and yet after journeying all these hundreds of miles to say the words, I cannot leave them unspoken. I came because of those last words of yours; I came because if you cared for me I had no right to stand apart and let you drift into a union with your

cousin; I came, Cicely, because if you love me, you belong to me, and your marriage with another man would be a sacrilege!"

He stopped, and a death-like silence followed his words. In her heart the girl was fighting over again her battle of love and loyalty.

Again Ray went on his slow way down the garden path, between the white roses and the nodding, crimson dahlias. She put out her hand and drew the fluttering curtains farther apart, and as she did so, he looked up and, catching sight of her, leaned on his crutch and lifted his hat in an eager, boyish salute. She touched the man beside her on the arm, and pointed to the limping figure below.

"That is my answer."

"I refuse to accept it."

"You must; I have no other for you."

"Do not answer now; think it over for a few hours."

"It would be useless. No amount of thinking could alter my decision. I promised to marry Ray in the joy and pride of his strength; I will not desert him now that he is broken in health and fortune — maimed in body and hope by the war to which I urged him, the war in which you were a victorious part!"

Then she stood up quickly, putting aside the passionate protest she read in his eyes: "Come, we will join Ray in the garden."

THE BELATED WEDDING GUEST 351

Half an hour later when she presented Fairlee to her father, she watched the two men keenly. Types of two sections they were, with different trainings, different outlooks; as far apart in opinion of public matters as the breadth of two political parties, yet so close in the things that go to the making of the higher manhood that the line of demarcation was too faint to trace.

Then Grandma Houston came with her tapping cane and stately courtesy to renew acquaintance with Fairlee and welcome him back to Pinehurst; and Ray and Guy vied with each other in their courtesies to the visitor. He had come on Minna's invitation to her wedding, he explained rather circumstantially; and Lena was the only one who guessed anything behind the spoken explanation.

The evening passed quickly in merry talk of the past winter, in inquiries and answers as to other members of the refugeeing party, or in grave and earnest discussion of Southern reconstruction and national affairs.

"I tell you, sir," cried Mr. Houston, waxing warm on the latter subject, "this system of carpet-bag government is the most terrible and demoralizing ever imposed upon a people. It is turning our defeat into persecution."

"Yet President Johnson is of your own people," said Fairlee.

"Yes, by birth; but who is dictating his Southern



policy? Men who seem to entertain for us only the most malignant hatred. It is through the negroes, of course, that the browbeating comes. We are unarmed, defenceless, without any courts that will give us justice, and if we are forced to retaliate through such secret societies as the Ku Klux, it is not our fault. We had rather fight in the open — but fight we must, or be trampled by our ex-slaves driven on by unscrupulous politicians.”

“But the Ku Klux commit many deeds of lawlessness,” asserted Fairlee.

“Fighting the devil with fire,” laughed Mr. Houston. “The day will come, Captain Fairlee, when the country, realizing what the Ku Klux did for white supremacy in the South — and throughout the nation for that matter, for if the South succumbs now, the North and West will eventually be Africanized — will rise up and wipe every stain from the name of the organization.”

“You seem to regard them as benefactors.”

“As patriots,” calmly replied the older man. “By preserving the integrity and rule of the Anglo-Saxon race, these men are preventing the United States from becoming a North American Brazil. It will take years — half a century, perhaps longer — for this truth to be accepted, but its acceptance is certain. African equality in the South means African equality in the North — it cannot stop in one section. And what would be the result?

THE BELATED WEDDING GUEST 353

The ruin of two nationalities in their mongrel offspring. Individually this means degeneracy; nationally, it means ostracism from among the first powers of the earth. That is why I say the Ku Klux, because they are withstanding what would be the eventual downfall of their race, are patriots!"

"Your position, then, is that in the amalgamation of races no colour line can be successfully passed?"

"It is; particularly when one nation has the physical and mental deficiencies of the negroes. Students of ethnology will rally to the truth of that assertion."

"And you think the South would have been better off had President Lincoln not been killed?"

"Yes. This has been called 'Lincoln's war,' and so long as we were in the field it was. But," and he struck the table beside him a sharp blow, "Abraham Lincoln, though he fought us armed, would never have fought us in defeat. He had a justice too strong, a mental sweep too wide to have imposed upon us the frightful conditions under which we are living. This reconstruction policy of the South's political enemies is worse than the war itself."

"I myself consider Lincoln the foremost man of the day," said Fairlee.

"You fought us, Captain Fairlee; you know whether we were a brave and patriotic soldiery. If we had not been, the war would not have lasted

six months. Look around you while you are in the South and see if we are treated as a brave foe deserves. It is the hand of tyranny, not the hand of victorious justice that metes out our fate. But we will overcome it, sir; we will overcome it. There is something in the soil we tread, in the air we breathe, in the traditions we inherit that precludes a long subjugation. We are down now, but we will rise, stronger and greater than ever. Mark my words."

It was long past midnight when the circle broke up and Jake handed out the bedroom candles at the hall table. Fairlee, taking his, lingered, talking to the old man until Cicely came out of the dining-room whither she had gone on some house-keeping errand. They stopped a moment on the rug in front of the empty fireplace.

"Here is where we parted last winter," he said.

"I remember; Grandma Houston was reading prayers in the library, and you would not return with me."

"Because she was praying for the success of the Confederacy, and I could not say amen to that," he smiled. "But will you repeat the beautiful blessing you gave me then — 'God keep you wherever you go'?"

"With all my heart," she answered.

But Ray was waiting with her candle, and the last thing Fairlee saw that night was the slender,

THE BELATED WEDDING GUEST 355

emaciated figure, with the beautiful eyes that were so like Cicely's own, leaning on his crutch and lifting his own candle to light her on her upward way. At the turn of the stair she stopped and waved her hand, smiling with her lips but not with her eyes, and then was gone. For Fairlee the picture reproduced itself on the black canvas the night spread for his dreams.

In the morning he would go, though urged to remain. He was not sure enough of his self-control to hazard a longer stay.

"Well, you must come for the next wedding at Pinehurst, and be on time," said Mr. Houston hospitably. And Allyn caught the glance Ray shot to Cicely.

"You are very kind, but Georgia is a long way from Connecticut, and I do not know when I shall be coming South again." And then, under pretext of having left something in his room, he ran up stairs again. When he returned he found all the others had gone out to the steps to see him off, and that only Cicely remained in the hall. With a grateful exclamation he sprang down to her.

"You have not changed your mind during the night hours — you have no different answer for me this morning?" There was a beseeching note in his voice that started that trembling of her hands, but she answered steadily:

"No; I have no other answer."

"You will persist in this sacrifice of me — of yourself?"

"I have no right to call it a sacrifice."

"I may not even write to you, hear from you?"

She shook her head: "It would be of no use."

"And this is the end?"

"The — very — end."

For a moment the pain in her eyes met the misery in his; then he lifted her hand to his lips and turned silently to the door. But from the threshold he came back with a quick stride, and opening his coat showed her the knot of gray ribbon that never left the neighbourhood of his heart.

"As long as I wear this and you keep its mate, there can be no end between us two," he said, and went.

But from between the fluted columns he turned to look at her once again. She was standing, statue-still, a slim, lithe figure in clinging white draperies. Behind her was the dark background of the wainscoted wall; at her feet lay the intricate pattern, the subtle mosaic of blues and greens and yellows that the sunshine wrought through the stained window. Across the shifting colour scheme she looked at him, her eyes wide and shadowed with the pain of her heart, her lips framing three words:

"The very end."

CHAPTER XV

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

For Love will find a way
Through paths where wolves would fear to prey — Byron.

MINNA'S plan for Cicely to visit her did not mature. Grandma Houston had not managed her household "without open revolt" for half a century to go down now in defeat; so, according to the old lady's decree it was Lena who went away to Savannah with Guy in the latter days of October. Very wistfully she looked back as she drove away, for Ray stood with Cicely beside one of the portico columns, and waved her his smiling farewell. He had at last thrown away his crutches and used only a stick which by-and-by would also be discarded, and Lena felt that her season of usefulness to him was over; and with it would end the close, sweet companionship of the past months. He had come to be considered her special care because of her qualities as a nurse, but she knew that the hours they had spent together were numbered, now that he was getting so strong. When she came back he would no doubt be talking

of his marriage. She sat very still and white by Guy's side as they made the journey over the road made familiar by that memorable drive with Ray tossing in pain which she had feared would take his life.

From Savannah Guy brought back cheerful tidings. Minna and Terry were as happy as two turtle-doves. They were poor, but so was everybody else, for the war had wrecked all fortunes. They teased each other incessantly, and incessantly made up again with the enthusiasm and devotion of lovers; while Cousin Nora kept their house and spoiled them both. Terry sent word that the dear cousin was after the major, but had not caught him yet; and the major himself added a supplementary and self-explanatory message that he found his legs still good for retreat. Fairlee had called on Minna as he passed through Savannah, looking, so she declared, "more perfectly dear than ever, but so serious that Terry thought he must have a hollow tooth."

"Minna's like the fox with the cropped tail," said Guy. "She's married herself, so she wants everybody else in the same box; says she is going to make a match between Lena and Terry's law partner, a remarkably handsome young Irishman; and I must say he took to Lena from the moment he saw her. It will certainly be a match if she is willing."

Ray looked up quickly: "What folly, Guy! Lena is only a child; she's not thinking of marriage."

"Better take in the signs then; for she wears this man's flowers and sits in the moonlight with him," answered Guy, as he lounged out of the room.

"Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous, Cicely? — Lena thinking of beaux."

He was sitting across her sewing table opposite her, and she bent toward him: "Guy is right, Ray; Lena is no longer a child. She is nineteen; a woman, with a woman's heart to love and a woman's capacity to suffer."

He stopped laughing suddenly, and for a moment their eyes met in a strange, searching look; then she picked up her thimble and went on quietly with her sewing. For a long fifteen minutes he did not speak. She thought of many things in that time; of Lena tagging after Ray in the old childhood days, of Minna's happiness, of Major Bailey's message, and of Fairlee's sad eyes; but Ray's next words showed that he had kept the same train of thought.

"I had scarcely realized she was out of short dresses," he said at last. An hour later she found him looking over Lena's portfolio, staring with puzzled eyes at the pictures of himself in his soldier cap.

Those autumn days were long ones to Cicely, and but for the wholesome employment with which they were filled they would have been sad ones.

It was only at night, when she lay looking at the slit of starry sky through her curtains that she counted the hours with heart throbs. Fairlee had written her from Washington, but she had not replied; there was nothing for her to say, no smallest word to add to the answer she had given him, and to continue any communication with him seemed like playing with fire. Her best safety lay in silence. So she had laid the letter with his other two and the gray ribbon of their pretty pledge in the drawer of the table in the rose-room, and turned the key on them.

From Atlanta Cousin Maria wrote graphically of the ruined city. Helen's husband was among those working hard for the restoration of order and business; but it was like beginning with original chaos. Her own house had been burned, but being brick the walls still stood, looking out over the general desolation through sashless windows. It was a veritable city of ashes. Pompeii, suddenly unearthed, would have presented no more appalling spectacle than those tottering walls and monumental chimneys whose roofs and beams, whose very lares and penates had fed the flame to make a Sherman holiday! Most of the people, sent out by that cruel order of exile had returned. But, alas! how many of those who went would never come again — dying of hunger and hardships in that tragic exodus.

But the spirit of the people was beginning to

revive, something like hope was coming back to their hearts under the leadership of brave men of whom it may be said, because of their unselfish patriotism: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." And one by one the heaps of ashes were disappearing under the foundations of new homes, not palatial in structure or furnishings, but beneath whose roofs was finally to die out the fires of sectional animosity, and about whose door-stones were to bloom new flowers of reconciliation and reunion, and of undying loyalty to the great national structure that was to be up-built for the admiration and reverence of the whole world — the Republic of republics!

Ray was eager to join his mother and bear his part in the reincarnation of their city and their home; but neither she nor the Houstons would listen to such a plan. His life depended on the restoration of his whole shattered system, and here at Pinehurst was the place for him. He had chafed under the restraint all summer, but now with gradually increasing strength he was more impatient than ever, declaring each day that the next should be his last in idleness, and on that next finding himself as powerless as he was before.

"I wonder why the days seem so long?" he said to Cicely, watching her at her sewing.

"You miss Lena."

"But — I have you," he answered, a note of hesitation in his voice, a note she often caught now

when he said anything that touched the relation between them.

"Yes, but nobody can take Lena's place; she has a way of doing things all her own," she said, looking up a moment from her work. "She has been as eyes and feet and hands to you for months."

"She certainly never forgets a fellow's comfort, what he likes and does not like."

"Yes. I think I never met any one with fewer jars in her than Lena. She is altogether the most comfortable person to live with I ever saw."

"You were always fond of her."

"She is among the people I love best in the world."

She stitched on in silence for a while, then he asked, as though the conversation had never ceased: "Does she say anything of that young lawyer in her letters?"

"Who?"

"Why, Lena."

"Oh, I had forgotten that we were speaking of her. No, she rarely mentions him, but that is like Lena. Minna, however, writes that he is very devoted to her — visits her constantly and sends her flowers every day. It seems he is something of an artist, and is going to help her with her pictures."

"Like Fairlee used to? — I do not think that is quite the thing."

"Why not?"

"If Lena wants instruction, she ought to have a regular drawing master," he said irritably. "I shall speak to Grandma Houston about it."

She watched his restlessness day after day with a queer little flutter at her heart, and sometimes to keep from dwelling on the cause, she mounted Bess and fled along the country roads in long solitary rides, bursting through the deep shadows of overhanging branches and flashing out into the sunshine at a pace that tried the mettle of the mare and aroused her racing instincts.

"Some day you are going to break your neck in those mad gallops," Guy expostulated. "Why can't you be satisfied to go at a reasonable rate?"

She could not tell him that in those mad gallops she was running away from her own thoughts, and it taxed the mare's strength to keep ahead.

Then one day, at the end of three weeks, Lena returned. She was not expected, but McHenry had to pass near Pinehurst on a professional journey, and she had caught at the idea of his escort.

"Minna scolded about her coming," said the ex-sergeant, "but she was like a fish on a line with the pole at this end." Then his eye shut in that familiar wink: "If she doesn't come back soon, however, she'll break the best heart in Savannah. My partner has practised in no court but Cupid's since she came to us."

One by one Lena took up many of her former

duties as nurse, and Ray's restlessness disappeared. He no longer complained of the length of the days or fretted to be off to Atlanta. So apparent was his sudden content that Grandma Houston remarked on it, and once her father drew Cicely to him with a troubled, questioning gaze. But she smiled up at him in so reassuring a manner that he told his mother her fears were unfounded; that Cicely understood and was satisfied; and so no notice was taken of the hours Lena and Ray again spent together, reading or playing chess, or talking over her recent visit.

Many times did Bess skim along the highways during that last week of November following Lena's return, and she must have wondered sometimes in her dumb animal way, what was in the heart of her rider that made her forget to draw the rein on the upward slopes. When Ray met them on their return and helped Cicely from the saddle, it was his eyes, not hers, that were troubled.

"Is it not natural that she should be happy over your recovery?" asked Lena, to whom he had carried his questioning doubt of Cicely's apparent content.

One morning, following Cicely into the bay-window of the hall, where she had her sewing table, he dropped the alcove curtain behind him and sat down opposite her. Something in his quiet, concentrated manner told her that a crisis was at hand.

She tried to talk of the things of the plantation, but he interrupted her:

"Cicely, I am quite well at last; yesterday I threw away my stick, for I no longer need to lean on anything. I am now able to get to work, and next week I shall go to Atlanta. I have not said anything of our marriage for some time, realizing the injustice it would be to you in my helpless condition, but now that I am strong once more I wish to talk to you definitely about it."

She put her sewing aside, and leaning over the table took his thin hands in her strong, capable ones: "Ray, suppose you and I do not talk of it — that we never talk of it again."

"Cicely!"

"We were as children when that compact was made and grown people see things with different eyes."

"With different eyes? I do not understand you," he protested.

"I think you do. I love you ——"

"And you know that all my life I have loved you; since we were little children I have hoped to marry you"; he interrupted quickly.

"Wait," she said, beginning again. "I meant to say that I love you as I love Guy — as another dear brother, and you care for me in the same way — there, do not interrupt me; I understand you better than you understand yourself. Our marriage would be a mistake because there is another ——"

She felt the hand under hers tremble, then grow steady as by a strong effort. The light in his eyes must have been like that with which he had faced the Union guns that summer day before Atlanta.

"There can be no consideration of anything except our engagement and its happy consummation; that takes precedence of everything else. Will you not be sweet enough to name the day for the wedding?" His voice was low and very gentle.

"Name the day that would break Lena's heart?"

"Cicely you must not ——"

"Oh, yes, I must. You cannot save her, but I can."

"You talk in riddles. What do you mean?"

"I can save her, for I can give her the man she has loved in the silence of her soul all her life, the man who at last has come to love her."

He stared at her a moment, then pushed his chair back, as white as death. She stood up with him, still holding his hands across the narrow table.

"Cicely, you do not know what you are saying! You have no right to — you surely do not mean ——"

"Yes; I mean it all. In all these weeks and months of nursing you have come to see the gold that was always shining in Lena's character, the love that hid itself in her heart. It was right and

natural; no man could have overlooked her unselfish devotion."

"It is not of Lena that I am thinking, but of you," he cried passionately. "You are my first and only consideration."

"Because of our engagement, I understand; not because of the old affection. That is gone."

"Gone? You do not, you cannot think ——"

"I do not think, I know for a surety. You and Lena care for each other in the sweetest way that comes to human hearts, and only our engagement stands between you."

"You do not believe this, and I refuse to listen to such words."

"I do believe it; and I give you back your promise freely. And I wish you to understand, Ray, that in doing so, I myself make no sacrifice. I love you as I love Guy, and in no other way. There," she continued, interrupting the vehement words he was beginning. "You need not say anything, I understand perfectly; you would have held to your engagement to me of course, as I would have held to mine to you; for we are people of honour; but, Ray, our hearts are not ours for the giving or taking back. You are no more to blame for ceasing to love me than I am for never having really loved you at all. The engagement between us was a mistake, and we are more fortunate than many other people because we

have discovered that mistake before it was too late."

"You mean that our marriage would make you unhappy?"

"I mean that neither my happiness nor yours depends on the consummation of our engagement. For myself I have known this for a long time, but for you I only realized it after Lena went to Savannah. Your restlessness and anxiety then betrayed you."

"I always feared you did not really care, you were so distant, so indifferent. I have wanted to offer to release you, but of late I have feared that you would imagine I—I had something in mind besides your happiness."

She smiled, seeing the drift of his thought, and held out her hand: "I am glad, very glad we have set this matter right. We will always be the very best of comrades and friends; but we will never talk of this again; it must belong hereafter to the past. Lena is in the garden; tell her I sent you to her—for keeps"; she smiled and dropped the alcove curtain between them.

In the library she found her father, and standing behind his chair, with her arms over his shoulders, her cheek pressing his, she whispered: "It is all right, father; I have sent him to Lena, free and untrammelled. I promised you I would do what was best for his happiness, and I have."

"And you yourself, my child?" he asked anxiously. But when he had drawn her to his knee and saw her happy eyes, he was satisfied but also mystified, as a man always is when, by some momentary sweeping aside of a curtain, he catches a fleeting glimpse of the yawning chasm of self-abnegation into which a woman's eyes have looked calmly through days and months.

Half an hour later, from between the curtains of the rose-room, Cicely watched Lena and Ray come hand in hand down the garden path, and let the climbing joy of her heart surge over her. She was free; no galling sense of duty, no promise held her. No dread of exorbitant demands upon her heart, no shuddering thought of unwelcome caresses haunted her. Her life was her own once more; there was to be no oblation, no sacrifice — and all the world seemed full of singing, as of a choir invisible!

Then there was a catch in her breath, and she looked up to the elder Cicely and began to tremble. No sacrifice, when her heart was crying within her day and night for a joy denied it? No oblation, when she had already bared her breast for the knife of the high priest of duty, and he had taken his dole for the offering?

And on her knees beside the table whose locked drawer held her hidden treasures, she put her face in her hands and knew, that for the highest accom-

the collar that suffocated her. Where was he to-night — where, under all those pulsing white stars? Was he, too, thinking of this night a year ago? Was he keeping with her a tryst of memory, somewhere out there in the far, frozen North?

Turning from the window she sank down beside the table and unlocking the drawer drew it open.

Upon the little pile of letters lay a knot of pale gray ribbon that seemed to speak to her.

For a long, breathless minute she knelt looking at it, reading the message it gave, deciphering the new thought that whirled and burnt in her brain. Then, her eyes luminous with the reflection of that thought, she lifted the ribbon from its place, and leaning across the table picked up a pen with feverish fingers, and drew a sheet of paper to her.

A week later Allyn Fairlee, shutting the bitter Connecticut wind outside and entering his library, stood a moment on the rug in front of a glowing fire before picking up the letters on the mantel. One bore a Southern postmark, but the handwriting told him nothing, for he had never seen it before. Slowly he tore it open, and then stood transfixed, staring at the contents — a blank sheet of paper on which was pinned a ribbon like the one over his heart!

Not a word, not so much as an initial by way of explanation; but he did not need it. It was Cicely's ribbon; she was in trouble, she needed him, and this was her summons. Once, long ago he had made a like plea to her, and she had answered it at peril of her safety; and now she was sending him a call for aid out of the depths of some new disaster, brought on perhaps by the unsettled conditions in the South. His teeth set hard, and the blood left his heart at the thought of peril to her, and the other letters were scattered like withered leaves upon the carpet as, with a quick stride, he turned to the door. The deepening snow, the racing fury of the wind were forgotten; in his mind was but one thought — to reach her, to save her from any danger.

Again the December sunset burned amber and lilac through the purple mists that hung over Pinehurst as a horseman, coming up the avenue at full speed, drew rein at the door and sprang from the saddle. The negro on the horse behind caught the discarded bridle, while the man raced up the steps and passed between the white columns that were always as monuments in his memory. Mammy was in the hall and opened the door, crying out her surprise at sight of him. She would have shown him to the parlour, explaining volubly that Mr. Houston and Guy had been gone all day and that

"ole Miss" was taking a nap. Missy was the only one to receive him.

"Is anything the matter with Miss Houston; is she sick or in trouble?"

"No, sir, she ain sick; an' she doan' look troubled."

"Where is she?"

"She up stairs in de rose-room readin'; she set dar mos' er de time now. Ef you jes step in de parlour I'll go tell her."

But he put the old woman peremptorily aside; she need not trouble, he knew the way up stairs; he would find Miss Houston himself.

Up the long stair he sprang, two steps at a time, his anxiety lightening, his perplexity deepening at each bound; if she was not ill or troubled, what then? Before the familiar door he paused, and, strong man that he was, he knew he was trembling like a child in the dark at the memories that crowded upon him.

"Come in," was the answer to his knock; and he pushed open the door.

A fire burned between the brass andirons, and the room was flooded with the rose glow of the dying day, strained through the window curtains. Before the fire, with her profile to him, Cicely sat in the high, carved chair he remembered so well, her book at her feet, her hands clasped loosely in her lap.

She turned her head at the sound of his entrance,

and sprang up with a low cry, steadying herself against the carved back of the chair.

"It is you? You have come!"

He crossed the room, opening his coat as he did so, showing the two gray tokens pinned on his breast.

"You sent me the ribbon?"

"Yes."

"Some trouble has come to you which I may relieve, which you will allow me to lessen?"

"No trouble has come to me."

"You are in danger then; I can serve you?"

She shook her head: "I am not in any danger."

"What, then?" and his voice was hoarse with the passion that shook him: "The compact was if we needed each other ——"

"Yes, that was the compact — if we needed each other."

"And you ——"

Then, through the rose-threaded glory of the sunset that streamed between the glowing draperies, she stretched out her hands to him, and her smile was like an illumination:

"Yes, I need you. The ribbon was the call of my heart."

Before she had finished he held her close: "Cicely — dearest, dearest!"

And the radiant day drifted slowly toward the dark, while from the gilded frame above the mantel

the elder Cice!y looked down upon them and, in a trick of the firelight, seemed to smile.

For love had conquered prejudice and overcome pride and come into its royal own; and the history of the rose-room was at last reversed.

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